

# 02 Describing Crisis Stabilization Units

## Behavioral Health Crisis



When individuals are in a **behavioral health crisis** (e.g. *psychiatric or substance use related*), **behavioral health workers & social workers, clinicians, paramedics, and/or police** may respond to the event.

**Who responds** to these events, or the combination of practitioners who respond to these events, **varies by jurisdiction** based upon funding, resources, personnel, and legal and logistical concerns. Previously, when police responded to crisis events, they **traditionally had only two options:**



take someone to the emergency room



take someone to jail

**Police now have a third option:**



**Crisis Stabilization Units (CSUs)**.

## CRISIS STABILIZATION UNITS

**CSUs** are community-based temporary treatment centers (typically maximum of 14 days) that provide a range of temporary in-patient treatment services, including:

- Medication education and management
- Limited case management (*ID, clothing etc.*)
- Benefits counseling (*SNAP/WIC*)
- Individual substance use therapy and Buprenorphine inductions (*if appropriate*)
- Pet Therapy
- Group substance use therapy
- Individual, group, and family therapy
- Individual peer support therapy
- Limited family therapy and education, and
- Discharge Planning and coordination of care with family and other supports, including treatment providers.

When police respond to behavioral health crisis, they, or with the guidance of clinicians in some sites, can make the decision to deflect and transport the individual to the CSU. Transporting individuals to the CSU eliminates the need for jail and the devastating consequences of criminal legal system involvement.

## CRISIS STABILIZATION UNITS IN PIMA COUNTY

In 2011, Pima County, Arizona built the **Crisis Response Center (CRC)**, an example of a CSU, as an **alternative to sending people experiencing a behavioral health crisis to jail or emergency rooms**. The CRC uses a “no wrong door” policy which means they will **accept any person for nearly any reason** (other than individuals who require emergent hospitalization such as broken bones or serious bleeding) and regularly accept individuals brought to them by **police** (known as a deflection to the CRC). **The CRC is part of a larger facility** housing the crisis line, an emergency department, inpatient psychiatric hospital, and a mental health court.

## 02. Describing Crisis Stabilization Unit

To help make deflection to the CRC as accessible as possible for police, the **CRC has its own law enforcement entrance**. Once on site, a CRC intake worker meets the police officer and the deflected person at the door to welcome the person into the CRC and start the initiation process, known as a **warm handoff**. However, at this point, an individual **does not have a legal obligation** to participate in treatment at the CRC and can make the decision to **enroll or leave**.



★ If the individual declines, there are no consequences and the individual is free to go.

Importantly, once a police officer **makes the decision to deflect** a person and transports them to any treatment provider, including the CRC, **the option to arrest is gone**, even if the person doesn't enroll in the treatment program. This is a critical and important departure for police, but one that **does not punish the complex reasons people ultimately decline treatment**.

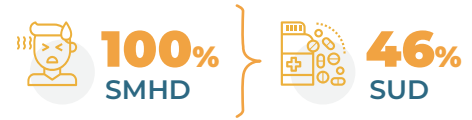
### DIVING DEEPER INTO PIMA COUNTY'S CRC

In Pima County, police officers can deflect people to the CRC for both behavioral health crisis and severe substance use issues.

 **6,545** individuals

experienced a police deflection to the CRC at least once between **July 2018 - March 2020**, some of whom received upwards of **38 deflections**.

**Everyone** who police deflected had at least one severe mental health diagnosis.



Nearly half of whom had co-occurring **substance use disorder**. Most importantly, without the option to deflect, police may have, instead, brought these vulnerable individuals to jail.

**While the CRC** does not promise to reduce police contact via its programming or services,

 **73%** of the people who received a deflection

between July 2018 and March 2020 **did not return to the CRC via police deflection**.

This suggests that police play an **important part in helping community residents access services they need**.



Oh you need compassion for these deflections. If you don't have compassion for people, i really would see this work being tough because a lot of these people have been through an insane amount of trauma. They didn't decide one day to wake up and do drugs and be homeless. It's about having compassion for people and real empathy, and connecting them to services to help them get better."

- Officer from Tuscon Police Department

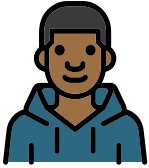


## 02. Describing Crisis Stabilization Unit

### IN OUR STUDY OF PIMA COUNTY'S CRC



we found most didn't return to the CRC via police deflection between **July 2018 and March 2020**. And, **27%** of people who arrived via police deflection **returned at least one more time**.



The study also found

### Black individuals

were significantly more likely to come back at least once via police deflection compared to all other racial groups.

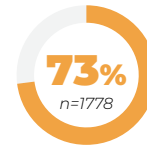
Although our study was not able to explain **why** this is happening, we think it is, in part, because Black people in Pima County have **disproportionate police contact** compared to their white and Hispanic peers.

★ **Importantly**, Pima County's deflection program allows for **repeat deflections and opportunities** to access the CRC or other community services. Therefore, individuals who traditionally experience disproportionate police contact in Pima County **now can see these contacts transformed into more opportunities to access services**.

Further, we found that **each time someone returns** to the CRC they **stay longer each time**. This means every time police deflect someone back to the CRC, they are receiving **even more treatment**.

Repeat police contacts with an individual mean police have more opportunities to work through the complex reasons people denied their first deflection. Most importantly, continuous deflections to treatment does not suggest a person "failed" the first time. There are lots of reasons people do not initially enroll or reasons they leave programs early in the process.

#### PATTERN ONE



Accepts deflection to CRC



CRC Visit



No Subsequent CRC Visit

#### PATTERN TWO



Accepts deflection to CRC

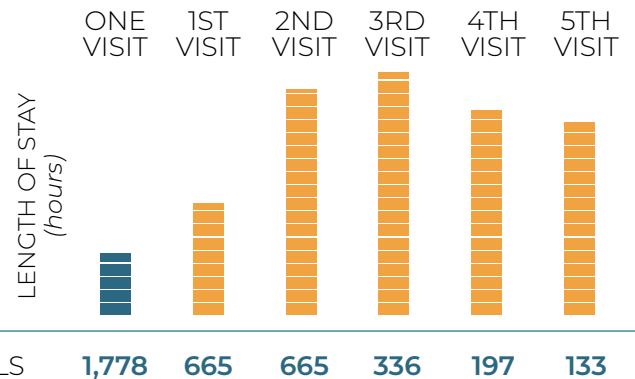


CRC Visit



Subsequent CRC Visit

### VOLUNTARY DEFLECTION PATTERNS



- Individuals who only went to the CRC one time
- Individuals who went back more than once

<sup>1</sup> <https://csgjusticecenter.org/2020/09/08/4-tips-to-successfully-open-a-crisis-stabilization-unit/>

## 02. Describing Crisis Stabilization Unit

### THE DUAL IMPACT OF CRISIS STABILIZATION UNITS & DEFLECTION PRACTICES ACROSS COMMUNITIES

Building from the success of Pima County's CRC and other CSUs across the country, **more communities are building their own CSUs**. It is critical that behavioral health workers act as the primary responder to individuals in behavioral health crisis and serve as the primary liaison between the individual and these new CSUs.

However, in some communities, police will remain involved and potentially the **only responder** to behavioral health calls. For these communities, adopting police-led deflection is **critical** to maximize the impact of the CSU. When police implement deflection strategies to their local Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU), they create **opportunities** to enhance equity of access to services, offer opportunities for people to get well, and eliminate the **collateral consequences** of the legal system for their residents and community.

### LEARN MORE

about the impacts of police-led deflection strategies on jail reduction efforts



**WE BLOGGED ABOUT IT**



This document was created with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as part of the Safety and Justice Challenge, which seeks to reduce over incarceration by changing the way America thinks about and uses jails.

<sup>1</sup> <https://csgjusticecenter.org/2020/09/08/4-tips-to-successfully-open-a-crisis-stabilization-unit/>