

06 DEFLECT ALL, IF AT ALL

DISPROPORTIONATE EXPERIENCES & CONSEQUENCES

Black, Brown, and Indigenous individuals, individuals with severe mental health diagnoses, and individuals with substance use disorders experience disproportionate police contact. This disproportionate contact often leads to disproportionate arrest and jail bookings. In turn, these minoritized populations disproportionately experience the collateral consequences of the criminal legal system, including wage or job loss, the suspension of public benefits, housing loss, and the trauma of the incarceration experience. And, once released from jail,

they are more likely to experience more police contact. Police-led deflection is a program that can transform disproportionate police contact that typically ends in arrest into opportunities to broker access to community-based resources. Specifically, police-led deflection allows police officers to offer access to community treatment providers in lieu of arresting someone.



DRAWING LESSONS FROM RESEARCH SITES

Importantly for deflection programs like those in Pima County, Arizona or in Charleston County, South Carolina, police practice states that once an officer makes the decision to not arrest the person at the point of transport, the person is no longer eligible for arrest. This means that if a person receives transport to a local community-based provider but decides not to enroll, police do not respond with an arrest.

In our study of police led-deflection, officers commented on the number of complex reasons individuals do not enroll in treatment. This can include fears about not completing the program, withdrawal symptoms, and strict program rules. But it can also result from previous experiences with victimization at treatment centers and experiences with racism, cis-sexism, heterosexism, and ableism by organizations, systems, and treatment providers. Although police understand why people may not want to accept a deflection, officers say they arrested people when they declined even if they felt the arrest would not help the person. Officers explained they felt like they needed to respond in some way.

CHALLENGING POLICE TO GO BOLDER

Interestingly, police practice in these counties says an arrest is not necessary for these types of calls and it's not necessary even if the person declines treatment once they're at the treatment provider's door. Therefore, police practice agrees that under some conditions, arrest is not necessary. However, police in these sites describe

relying on arrest when people decline treatment. As described by officers in Pima and offered across research, treatment initiation is complex and declining treatment is not necessarily about willingness or not wanting to change. Reconsidering the purpose of arrest anywhere

For these two sites,

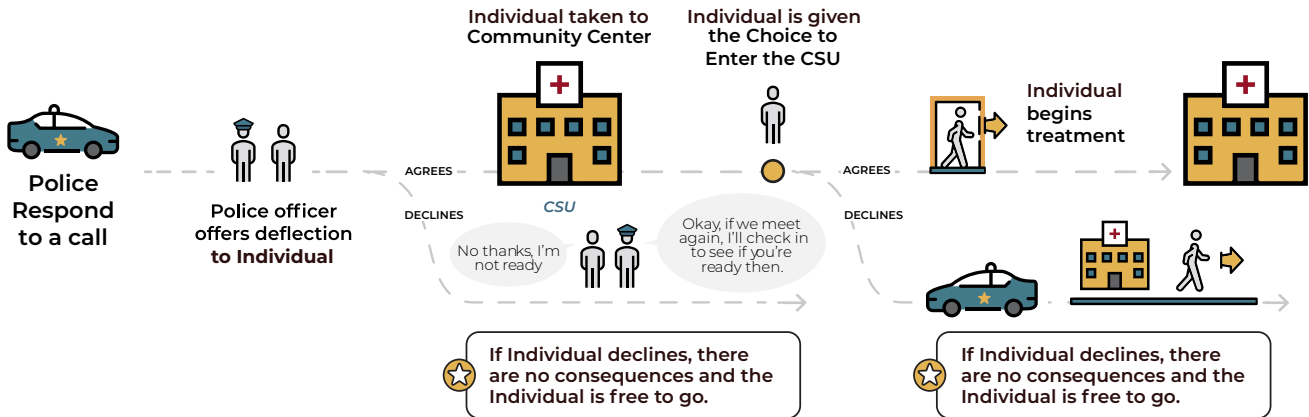
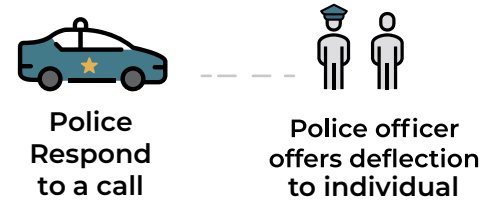
1 police practice has determined some calls for service do not need an arrest at all and treatment is a better option.

2 declining treatment at the treatment provider's door does not need to end in arrest.

06. Deflect All, If At All

in the deflection process may have important implications on many groups, but particularly Black, Brown, Indigenous, gay, trans-, and disabled people – many of whom who may decline treatment to avoid repeat exposure to discrimination.

“Deflect all, if at all” as a matter of police practice means that under ALL circumstances where deflection is eligible, police should only offer deflection and should remove the option to arrest completely. And, if a person declines the deflection at any point in the process, then police do not respond by arresting the person. This is not necessarily a significant change in practice for many police departments and specifically for Pima and Charleston counties -- it simply asks police to **extend their philosophy to earlier in the deflection** process and not arrest individuals when they decline a deflection.



“Deflect all, if at all” allows police to take an equity approach to policing by acknowledging how inequity has manifested for these vulnerable individuals in the past and actively acknowledges how continued arrests exacerbates inequities. Critically challenging the need for an arrest response for deflection-eligible offenses challenges police to go bolder and rethink how they can transform disproportionate contacts as opportunities to encourage access to treatment instead.

LEARN MORE

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

WE BLOGGED ABOUT IT



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