

LOS ANGELES POLICE COMMISSION

Update on the Department's Systemwide Mental Assessment Response Team and Domestic Abuse Response Team Programs



Conducted by the

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL

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**UPDATE ON THE DEPARTMENT’S SYSTEMWIDE MENTAL ASSESSMENT
RESPONSE TEAM AND DOMESTIC ABUSE RESPONSE TEAM PROGRAMS**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Systemwide Mental Assessment Response Team (SMART) program pairs an LAPD police officer that is assigned to the Department’s Mental Evaluation Unit (MEU) with a Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) clinician and was designed to facilitate effective engagements with persons experiencing a mental health crisis and to connect those persons to appropriate services. The Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART) program pairs an LAPD police officer with a domestic violence advocate. DART units respond to incidents of reported domestic violence with the goal of providing education, resources, and follow-up services to those who have been affected by such violence. Both programs rely on patrol units to ensure that a scene is relatively safe prior to approach or engagement by SMART or DART personnel.

With regard to patrol response times, the OIG was advised by LAPD’s Communications Division that Mental Health-Related (MHR) and Domestic Violence-Related (DVR) incidents may be dispatched as either Low Priority, Code 2 (urgent but not life threatening), or Code 3 (emergency, with vehicle emergency lights and siren activated) calls – based on the information that a caller has provided to the Radio Traffic Officer (911 dispatcher). The Department tracks statistical data related to patrol response times, which are provided by Compstat Division. The tables below provide citywide median response times for the five years from 2018 through 2022 for MHR and DVR calls.

Citywide Mental Health-Related Calls Median Citizen Response Time in Minutes			
Year	Code 3	Code 2	Low Priority Call
2022	7.7	22.4	40.0
2021	7.2	20.2	40.6
2020	7.2	18.6	34.2
2019	6.9	17.8	34.3
2018	6.9	18.0	36.8

Citywide Domestic Violence-Related Calls Median Citizen Response Time in Minutes			
Year	Code 3	Code 2	Low Priority Call
2022	7.4	27.0	69.8
2021	7.2	24.3	57.4
2020	7.0	22.4	59.5
2019	7.0	20.4	50.7
2018	7.0	21.0	57.4

Note: “Median Citizen Response Time in Minutes” refers to the time from the call creation within the dispatch system to the time the first patrol unit arrived and broadcast a Code 6 – indicating that they were on scene.

Radio calls accompanied by a Code 3 designation are emergency calls, for which a field unit is required to respond in a manner that enables them to reach the scene as quickly as possible while remaining safe.

The responding unit's emergency lights and siren shall be used whenever it is necessary to disregard "the rules of the road" provision in the California Vehicle Code. An emergency exists when one or more of the following elements are present: a serious public hazard; an immediate pursuit; the preservation of life; a serious crime in progress; the prevention of a serious crime; an officer requests another unit to respond Code 3. A Code 2 designation is for an urgent call, but one that is not life threatening. For Code 2 calls, the responding unit's emergency lights and siren shall not be used, and all California vehicle codes shall be obeyed. A low priority call is any call broadcast as a report or investigation that is not designated Code 2 or Code 3. In examining the 5-year average for both MHR and DVR calls, 21 percent of them were dispatched as Code 3 incidents, 77 percent as Code 2 incidents, and the remaining 2 percent as low priority incidents.

Management personnel from both SMART and DART advised the OIG that they currently have no method for tracking response times for their units, given that these programs were never intended to replace patrol assets, but rather to supplement and support them. As it relates to the MEU, the OIG was advised that its response times could range anywhere from 15 to 90 minutes, based on the availability of SMART Units as well as traffic congestion. The OIG discussed with the MEU the matter of recording SMART response times – especially in light of the MEU's desired expansion (discussed further below) – in an effort to determine whether/how much response times improve as more SMART Units are created. The MEU was agreeable to the recommendation and is currently seeking methods to effectively capture this data point. As it relates to DART units, tracking their response times may potentially yield some valuable information that can help identify inefficiencies and ensure that these critical units are able to go where they are needed as quickly as possible.

The remainder of this report will provide details about the SMART program first, followed by the DART program, along with statistical data for the last five years covering 2018 through 2022.

II. MENTAL EVALUATION UNIT

The Department's MEU has been in existence for over four decades. Its primary role is to assist field officers with MHR calls for service. Currently, the MEU is composed of subunits including the MEU Training Unit, Triage Desk, Case Assessment Management Program (CAMP), and SMART.

The Triage Desk is a 24-hour/7-day-a-week resource available to Department personnel. Triage Desk personnel record all Department contacts with persons experiencing a mental health crisis by completing a Mental Evaluation Incident Report. These reports are generally kept confidential in order to ensure the privacy of the individuals contacted.

When called on by field personnel, the Triage Desk also advises officers of any prior contacts with an individual who may be experiencing a mental health crisis or is otherwise mentally ill. Additionally, if the Triage Desk determines that a person has had repeated MHR contacts with police or has demonstrated high-risk behaviors, they will notify CAMP in order to initiate more intensive case management. CAMP is an investigative follow-up team which consists of Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) clinicians and MEU officers. CAMP links people with mental illness to mental health resources, with the goal of mitigating risk and the possibility of future violent contacts with the community and first responders.

In 1993, Los Angeles was one of the first cities to establish a two-person police/mental health team, which is known today as SMART. This program is co-supported by the LACDMH. A SMART Unit consists of a plain-clothes police officer and an LACDMH clinician. In the past, a patrol unit would respond to a radio call first and then request a SMART Unit if/when applicable. In January 2021, however, this aspect of LAPD's response to radio calls was modified to a "co-responder model" in which a SMART Unit is dispatched along with a patrol unit for MHR calls that include one or more of the following criteria:

- *The subject is violent*
- *The subject is armed, and the public is at risk*
- *A welfare check is called for*
- *The subject has possibly committed a criminal act due to mental illness*
- *The subject's behavior is high-risk*
- *There is a critical incident in which SMART may assist with de-escalation*

SMART operates on a 24/7 schedule, and there are currently 11 to 14 SMART Units available per day. The majority of SMART Units are deployed during the Mid-day shift, which runs from 1000 to 2000 hours, and the PM shift, which runs from 1530 to 0130 hours. This deployment is based on historical data showing that a heavier volume of MHR radio calls occur between these hours. LACDMH clinicians are not deployed from the hours of 0130 to 0600; as a result, a unit consisting of two MEU officers are dispatched between these hours.

After roll call at the MEU office at Police Headquarters Facility, SMART Units are assigned to one of the four Department's geographic Bureaus: Operations-Central Bureau (OCB), Operations-South Bureau (OSB), Operations-Valley Bureau (OVB), and Operations-West Bureau (OWB). However, SMART Units are not restricted to work within a particular Bureau. For example, if a SMART Unit is not available for a call in OVB, a SMART Unit stationed at OCB could be dispatched there.

To see first-hand how SMART Units operate and what challenges they face, OIG staff participated in a ride-along with a SMART supervisor unit on February 22, 2023. Among other things, OIG staff observed the significant delay in response time, due to rush hour traffic that resulted when a SMART Unit was dispatched from OSB to respond to a call in OVB. OIG staff also observed that SMART Units were unable to respond to several radio calls requesting their assistance since all SMART Units were already handling other incidents at the times when those additional calls were generated. SMART Units spent significant amounts of time during their shifts doing things like waiting for a private ambulance to respond to a police station to transport

a patient to the hospital or waiting for a bed at that hospital to become available. OIG staff was advised that such periods of waiting could commonly last as much as six hours, meaning that it is not unusual for a SMART Unit working a 10-hour shift to handle only two or three radio calls in total during their shift.

Mental Health Calls and SMART Unit Statistics

The table below provides the number of MRH radio calls that the Department has received in the last five years, along with the number and percentages of incidents that were handled by MEU.

Year	MHR Calls	Calls Requesting SMART	SMART Unit Responded	Triage Desk Handled	Cases Referred to CAMP
2022	31,292	22,565	6,606 (29%)	16,749	1,616
2021	30,486	18,230	7,469 (41%)	12,350	1,773
2020	32,476	19,226	6,712 (35%)	12,514	1,627
2019	33,064	20,758	7,871 (38%)	12,887	1,834
2018	33,846	20,390	8,338 (41%)	12,054	1,776

SMART – Additional Resources

LAPD's MEU ultimately desires to expand its SMART program to a total of 24 units in order to increase the number of MHR radio calls to which it can respond. Currently, MEU has been approved for 12 additional police officer positions; however, filling these positions is contingent on LACDMH filling its own current clinician vacancies (of which there are currently 7). LACDMH management advised that it is experiencing challenges with filling clinician vacancies due to competitive salaries being offered by other sectors in the industry as well as more appealing perks such as tele-health, which allows clinicians to work from home. The following table shows the number of additional personnel needed, as reported by the Department's MEU, to expand to 24 SMART Units.

MEU Personnel Required for 24 SMART Units			
POSITIONS	Goal	Currently Have	Need
Police Officers	84	52	32
Senior Lead Officers	4	4	0
Supervisors	16	12	4
Total LAPD Personnel	104	68	36
LACDMH Clinicians	50	19*	31

*This number includes 7 current vacancies.

Should the expansion of the MEU occur as desired, a larger facility may be needed to house MEU personnel, and additional equipment will be required (i.e. vehicles, Mobile Data Computers, etc.).

III. DOMESTIC ABUSE RESPONSE TEAM

A DART Unit is composed of an officer and a maximum of two civilian advocates. A critical aspect of the DART program, as indicated by the Department, is connecting a victim to an advocate right after an incident has occurred, whether in-person or via phone. The chances that a victim of domestic violence will indeed seek services available to assist them decrease if that victim is not connected directly to an advocate immediately. Currently, the DART program has 36 advocates working throughout the Department. Of these, 25 are paid by the service provider that employs them, and the remaining 11 are volunteers. Advocates are required by the State of California to complete a 40-hour domestic violence training course. Additionally, DART officers and advocates are also trained by local nonprofit organizations, and they may also receive some training provided by the Department. The attire of officers who work as part of a DART unit is determined by those officers' geographic Area commands – some commands prefer these officers to be in plain-clothes while others prefer them to be in full uniform.

Per the Department, its first DART program started in Van Nuys Area in 1994 in partnership with the Domestic Abuse Center. A second DART program was initiated in 1997 when LAPD's 77th Street Area partnered with Project Peace Makers, Inc., and a third program arose in 2006 when Northeast Area partnered with Peace Over Violence. By 2014, DART programs were in 13 Areas and were partnered with additional service providers, including Sojourn in West Bureau, and Jewish Family Services and Strength United in Valley Bureau. In 2015, DART expanded to all 21 of LAPD's geographic Areas through grant and private funding as well as the City's General Funds. As of fiscal year 2018-2019, DART has been fully funded through General Funds. Contracts for DART service providers, which were last awarded for Fiscal Year 2022-2023, are for three-year terms, and there is an individual contract for each of the Department's 21 geographic Areas. Currently, there are six service providers holding such contracts.

There is one DART Unit assigned at each geographic Area. The days and hours worked by DART Units are determined by each Area after consideration of when there is the highest activity of DVR calls and crimes. DART Units operate on a 4/10 schedule (meaning 4 days per week and 10 hours per day). Whenever no DART Unit is available to respond to a DVR call, patrol officers who respond should advise the victim that the Department works with a community-based organization that can offer them a variety of resources. If the victim would like to be contacted by an advocate within three working days, the victim fills out and signs an "Authorization to Release Contact Information" form, and that form is then given to DART for further follow-up.

DART Statistics

The table on the following page provides the number of DVR radio calls that the Department has received in the last five years along with the number and percentages of incidents that were handled by DART Units (including on-scene responses, station walk-ins, and referrals from patrol officers).

Year	DVR Calls	DART On-Scene Response	DART Station Walk-ins	DART Referrals from Patrol Officers
2022	43,438	1,438 (3%)	469 (1%)	6,128 (14%)
2021	45,175	1,786 (4%)	390 (1%)	3,935 (9%)
2020	42,608	1,976 (5%)	369 (1%)	3,775 (9%)
2019	42,680	2,214 (5%)	860 (2%)	3,726 (9%)
2018	44,199	2,116 (5%)	839 (2%)	4,227 (10%)

DART – Additional Resources

As noted above, DART should be deployed in all of the Department's 21 geographic Areas. However, the OIG was advised that some DART officers have promoted and been assigned to other roles while the positions they vacated have not been filled. Other DART officers have been reassigned elsewhere in the Department due to staffing shortages. The Department indicated that its Detective Bureau is currently working with the Office of Operations to ensure that at least one officer is assigned to DART in each Area.

The OIG was advised that geographic Areas receiving a relatively high volume of DVR calls would benefit from having a second DART officer available. A DART Unit with two officers and an advocate could respond to a call and take over as the primary unit, freeing up the patrol officers who had initially responded to address other calls. The Department also expressed a desire to have a second DART Unit at each geographic Area. This additional unit could assist with the overall volume of DVR calls and could also provide coverage on whichever days the current DART Unit is not assigned to work. Beyond more personnel, the Department indicated that obtaining access to portable Mobile Data Computers (MDCs) for the DART Program would also be beneficial. The portable MDCs would allow DART Units to monitor calls while at their assigned station and determine whether to respond based on the circumstances of the call, as opposed to only waiting for patrol officers to request their response to a scene.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The OIG recommends that the Department continue with its efforts to expand the MEU and create additional SMART Units in order to improve response times and increase the overall number of MHR calls to which a SMART Unit can respond.
2. The OIG recommends that the Department consider expanding DART resources to include having two DART Units at each Area. This would expand DART coverage hours and allow for an increased number of on-scene responses by DART personnel.

3. The OIG recommends that the Department track response time data for its SMART and DART Units. This data may yield valuable insights on how response times of these critical units can be shortened as much as is feasible. With regard to SMART Units, tracking this information will become increasingly important should the MEU be expanded and the number of SMART units increased.