
Equitable Mobile Crisis Response for Older Adults in Washington State: Key Findings and Recommendations

ISSUE:

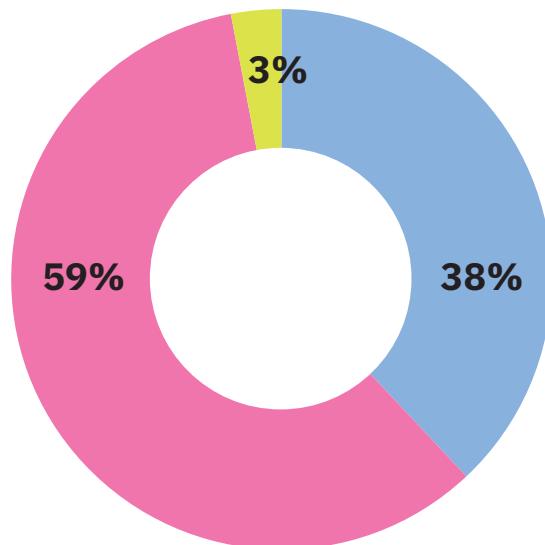
Older adults in crisis face unique challenges that require specialized approaches to care, including behavioral health care. While Washington State has many elements of a strong crisis system, it lacks comprehensive guidelines and best practices for effectively supporting older adults.

METHODS:

Eleven semi-structured focus groups were conducted between March–May 2024 (N=41) with professionals working in the aging network or crisis care and analyzed using rapid qualitative analysis methods.

PARTICIPANTS:

- █ Aging and Older Adult Services
- █ Crisis Services (including MCR)
- █ Other



FINDINGS:

A fragmented crisis response system:

The current crisis response system is fragmented and specifically lacks integration across crisis and older adult care.

“You get all these systems that you spiral through. You just get lost in it.”

Limited accessibility for the unique needs of older adults: Many older adults face significant barriers to accessing crisis resources due to the lack of accommodations for chronic or complex medical conditions, mobility issues limitations, neurocognitive disorders, and other age-related challenges.

“It’s almost like you have to have almost a perfect client to be able to find a place for them.”

Workforce limitations: The workforce is both limited in size and lacking in specialized training to address the specific needs and care requirements of older adults.

“Staff have to have a pressure on their back, knowing you can hear the phone ringing in your pocket. It’s busy, it’s busy, and I’m an hour and a half away, and we’re not even close to being done. And they shouldn’t have that.”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Improve Funding: Consistent funding from federal, state, and local sources is essential to strengthen crisis response systems.

Collaboration Across Sectors: Foster partnerships across crisis responders, healthcare, and aging services to enhance response capabilities and resource sharing.

Workforce Support and Expansion: Provide specialized training, psychosocial support, and competitive pay to retain staff, while building a pipeline for future crisis responders.

Enhance Stabilization Facilities: Ensure crisis facilities are equipped to meet the physical and medical needs of older adults.

Equitable crisis response: Continue to strengthen relationships with Tribal Nations, communities of color, rural populations, and other communities currently underserved by the crisis system to ensure needs of older adults are equitably addressed.



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