



Public Health Playbook

Planning for a Behavioral
Health Crisis Response Solution



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The need for coordinated services to help individuals in the midst of a behavioral health crisis is immense. The launch of the new National Suicide Prevention Lifeline this past July could not have come at a better time. Since the onset of the pandemic, behavioral health conditions have increased 50% and suicide rates continue to increase nationwide. Meanwhile, **suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the U.S.** Every day, approximately 132 Americans die by suicide. There is one suicide death in the US every 11.5 minutes.

Whether at the city, county or state level, the ability to better support crisis management is critical for our communities to **connect anyone, anywhere, to the right care anytime**. Support for such services is increasing. The federal government launched 988 as the national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline in July 2022, and has been increasing funding for crisis services—including community-based mobile crisis teams, hotlines, equipment and training. In February 2023, more than 480,000 people were connected to the crisis services using the 988 Lifeline.

Having an **effective behavioral health crisis response solution** is an essential component for coordinating services. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), these systems operate as air traffic control for crisis management services, and should include:

- A GPS-enabled mobile team dispatch
- Real-time bed registry and coordination
- Centralized outpatient appointment scheduling
- Performance dashboards to support coordination

Knowing where to begin in developing such a solution, however, can be daunting. To help, Bamboo Health has assembled initial steps and key considerations from our years of experience working with states and thought leaders to develop crisis management technology.



Connect anyone, anywhere, anytime

Assess Your Current Processes and Identify Gaps

To understand where you need to go, you first need to understand where you are. This step begins with taking an inventory of existing technology, resources and processes, and evaluating your current care coordination system for crisis response. You should develop a thorough understanding of how local healthcare providers, hospitals, law enforcement agencies and other entities handle behavioral health crisis cases—including if and how those individuals are referred to care and any follow-up procedures. Ask these questions:

- What technology is in place?
- What technology should stay and what should go, based on resources and needs?
- What systems should be connected to establish an optimal crisis response solution? (CRM, phone center, phone technology, data warehouse, reporting system)

This assessment will allow you to identify what is working well today, and where there are gaps and opportunities for improvement.

Define Your Objectives

Describe your overall public health goals, including the issues a well-designed crisis management solution should solve, the need for the solution in your community (or communities), and the key gaps you will need to fill to achieve those goals. For example, there may be gaps in the current approach to crisis care coordination, the public may lack access to—and coordination with—care resources, or communicating with and dispatching trained emergency service teams may not be part of a technology-enabled process.

To define your goals, you should understand what a successful crisis management system looks like. According to SAMHSA, it's a system that:

- Standardizes crisis care processes and quality
- Promote suicide prevention as a core component of healthcare services
- Focuses on resolving mental health and SUD conditions
- Decreases psychiatric bed overuse and eliminates emergency department boarding
- Decreases the drain on law enforcement
- Decreases the fragmentation of behavioral healthcare

This process will aid in building support by helping you to clearly communicate your goals and objectives to key stakeholders and community members.



Gather All Stakeholders

Developing an effective behavioral health crisis response solution requires input from a variety of stakeholders. Consider which agencies, groups and individuals need to be involved in developing the solution, and what level of involvement is needed to make the project widely adopted and successful. Examples of core stakeholders may include:

Department/ Titles	Government	Community	Health Plans	Other
Program Director	State/Local Department of Health	NAMI	Medicare/Medicaid	Faith-Based Organizations
Administrator	State Department of Corrections	Mental Health America	Commercial Health Plan Representatives	Local Homeless Services Organizations
IT Security Leader	Local Law Enforcement	State Hospital Plan Representatives		

Develop A Plan

With input from stakeholders, the team should evaluate its options and establish a plan for developing the needed behavioral health crisis response solution. A fundamental question to consider early on is whether to build a new solution from the ground up, or work with a vendor to tailor an existing solution to the specific needs of your community.

If you opt to work with a vendor partner, ask these important questions:

- Do you have a complete solution developed today?
- If there is an off-the-shelf solution, is it customizable? If yes, how so?
- Is the technology scalable?
- What are the limits to connections, if any?
- How is your security system structured, and does it comply with government regulations?
- What other entities have you worked with? Can you demonstrate a history of success?
- What does the average implementation time frame and process look like?
- What support services do you provide for our team maintaining the solution?



Consider How to Measure Success

Ensuring processes for continuous improvement are vital to establishing an effective behavioral health crisis management solution. Success can be tracked at a micro and macro level. Determine what data elements are available currently, and what data can be used in future reporting.

Ensuring you have a single source of truth for metrics is essential. Define which systems will be the primary data source, and what systems will be used to extract the data into a reporting engine. Some examples of key performance indicators to track include:

- Crisis call volumes
- Dispatch acknowledgment, acceptance, and response times
- Mobile crisis unit availability
- Referral submissions, acknowledgments, and reviews (including patient show and no-shows)
- Placement trends over time (including referral acceptance or declinations)
- Patient follow-ups and final dispositions management solution

Executing Your Coordinated Efforts

The current approach to behavioral health crisis management is piecemeal in many communities. Far too many individuals fall through the cracks as a result. The cost to communities, families and the broader public is just too great. Developing a comprehensive and integrated behavioral health crisis solution is critical to closing gaps in care.

Bamboo Health's Crisis Management System is designed to expedite access to assessment and treatment for those in crisis, track their journey from call to treatment and coordinate all stakeholders within a crisis management system. Combined with our traditional OpenBeds referral system and underlying behavioral health treatment network, the crisis management system supports collaboration with local crisis response teams, law enforcement organizations, local community organizations, faith-based organizations and other behavioral health stakeholders in their efforts to ensure the integrated delivery of culturally competent, strengths-based and family-centered services. The results will be a well-coordinated response, supporting all in the community.

Additional resources include:

[SAMHSA's National Guidelines for Behavioral Crisis Care: Best Practice Toolkit](#)





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