



COOK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Thomas J. Dart, Sheriff

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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312-603-4242

Northbrook Police Partners with the Cook County Sheriff's Office's Innovative Mental Health Co-Responder Program

COOK COUNTY, IL – The Cook County Sheriff's Office is now providing immediate on-scene mental health co-response overnight and on weekends to residents of the Village of Northbrook under an agreement between the Sheriff's Office and the Northbrook Police Department, Sheriff Thomas J. Dart announced today.

The Northbrook Police Department is the third local law enforcement agency in Cook County to utilize the Cook County Sheriff's Treatment Response Team (TRT) Co-responder Virtual Assistance Program (CVAP), which provides mental health co-response to police officers when they respond to calls involving mental health crises. The agreement expands the social and mental health services that Northbrook Police have been providing residents for more than four decades.

"We are excited to partner with the Northbrook Police Department, which for years has understood the importance of addressing the mental health needs of the people they serve," Sheriff Dart said. "Historically, law enforcement agencies have primarily focused on the immediate criminal or public safety concern, with less concern about the underlying causes that have led to the immediate crisis. We believe partnerships like the one between Northbrook and my office can reduce unnecessary arrest and involvement in the legal system and connect individuals with the resources they need to treat or manage their mental health concerns."

Starting last week, Northbrook officers are now able to utilize the TRT's Co-responder Virtual Assistance Program (CVAP) to connect distressed individuals with TRT mental health workers and clinicians via video conferencing on an electronic tablet or by phone. TRT staff will then connect these individuals with staff from the Northbrook Police Department's Counseling Services Unit, who will continue to work with these clients to engage them with appropriate services and resources. During normal business hours, CSU staff will assist Northbrook officers with mental health calls.

"Northbrook has been and continues to be a Police Department laser-focused on providing the highest level of caring concern and service to the community," said Northbrook Chief of Police

Christopher Kennedy. “This partnership is the perfect complement to our longstanding imbedded professional counseling care, which has been part of our department for over 40 years now.”

Launched in late December 2020, CVAP has proven to be a powerful tool to safely de-escalate potentially volatile situations, as well as to provide aftercare and case management for individuals who need mental health services. The program was initially provided to Sheriff’s Police, which now has 120 electronic tablets distributed to officers and supervisors. In August 2021, the Oak Lawn Police Department entered an agreement to utilize CVAP, and the Blue Island Police Department joined in November.

With the addition of Northbrook, CVAP is now available to officers serving approximately 240,000 Cook County residents. The Sheriff’s Office has also been in conversation with other municipal police agencies who are exploring the use of the program for their officers.

CVAP is a continuation of Sheriff Dart’s vision to provide services in the community that can prevent individuals from becoming unnecessarily involved in the criminal justice system. Officers are provided electronic tablets which allows initiate videoconferencing with distressed individuals within minutes, though calls can also be initiated by phone if necessary.

Unlike co-responder models that require a social worker to respond to police calls in person, CVAP enables a small team of mental health workers to provide near-instantaneous response anywhere in Cook County. Because the intervention is virtual, there is no risk of injury to the mental health worker, and the program can easily be scaled up to provide services to other law enforcement agencies, either to enhance existing programs like the Northbrook Police Department’s CSU or provide full-service co-response, and follow-up for departments that do not have in-house mental health programs.

Mental health calls for service have steadily increased and are only expected to continue to rise in the wake of the isolation and stress many people have experienced during the pandemic. In 2018, Sheriff’s Police responded to 1,712 calls for service involving mental health. In 2021, the number of calls exceeded 3,000 and, in the first two months of 2022, calls have outpaced those for the same period last year.

Since it began, the co-responder program has been utilized by Sheriff’s Police, Oak Lawn police, and Blue Island police more than 170 times.

“I am very pleased at the continued expansion of this program, Sheriff Dart said. “Our goal has always been to provide services for the entire country, and our partnership with Northbrook Police will only increase the ability of both agencies to provide more Cook County residents with the treatment and services they need.”