

July 2020

As communities around the world face a global health pandemic that is unparalleled in recent times, the mental health challenges that can result from uncertainty and social isolation have received a great deal of attention¹. In 2016, the SANDAG Criminal Justice Clearinghouse produced a [CJ Flash](#), noting the increase in regional mental health calls for service (MH CFS) between 2009 and 2015². In response to mental health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic and discussions regarding public safety reform, SANDAG reached out to local law enforcement to update this analysis. This InfoBits report includes these data and related statistics from various sources around the region.

Did you know?



106 per day

Average number of MH CFS local law enforcement responded to per day in May 2020.



1 in 4

Portion of arrestees booked into local jail/prison who reported previously staying overnight in a mental health facility.

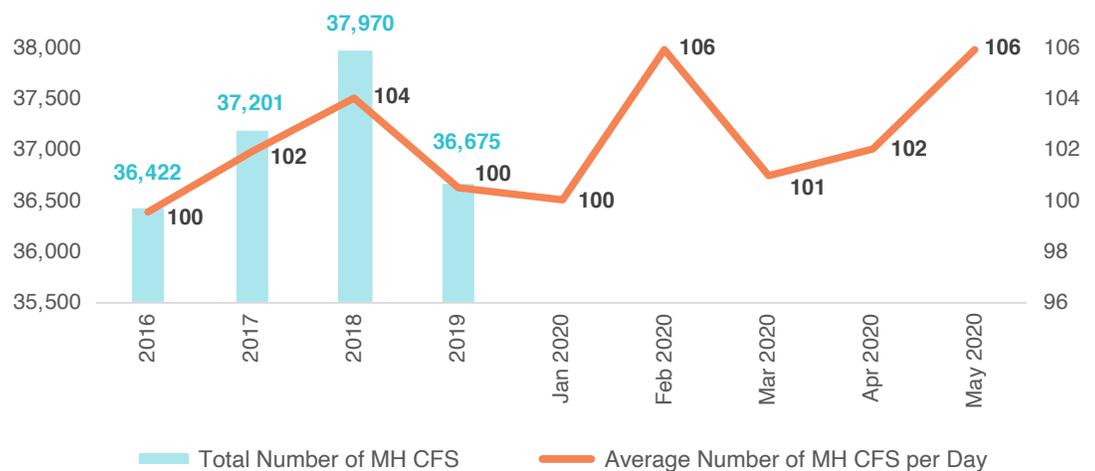


72

Number of funded Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT) clinicians in the San Diego region in FY 2019–20.

Regional MH CFS

From 2016 to 2019, local law enforcement around the region received an average of 100 to 104 MH CFS per day. In the first five months of 2020 (January through May), the daily averages have not varied significantly, but have increased slightly from 100 in January to 106 in February and May.



¹For additional information, please visit [cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html)

²It is important to note that the previous analysis was completed four years ago and the data compilation process relied on different agency staff. Caution should be used when comparing the numbers presented in this InfoBits report to those published in 2016.

Mental Health Needs of Justice Involved Individuals

According to a national survey, law enforcement agencies across the country have noted an increase in mental health needs in their communities. In the San Diego region, some practitioners have estimated one-third of the MH CFS are from individuals who have had repeated contact with the system. Interviews conducted by SANDAG as part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program showed:



These results demonstrate that additional efforts to build on best-practices are needed regionally. One such program was recently funded by the County of San Diego based on the results of the San Diego County District Attorney's effort to strategically address the mental health and homelessness needs of the criminal justice population. It is important that a continuum of care be available for individuals, such as this new pre-trial mental Health Diversion Program.

Best Practices: Pairing Law Enforcement with Mental Health Professionals

Amid community discussion regarding law enforcement reform and opportunities to redirect some law enforcement calls to other entities, it is important to acknowledge the Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT) that represents a decades-old partnership between licensed mental health clinicians, trained law enforcement officers, and emergency medical services (EMS). PERT was established in 1996 and created to de-escalate mental health emergencies and, when appropriate, to redirect a person in need to mental health services, rather than a hospital or jail. With the County of San Diego providing additional funding for this program in 2019, there were a total of 72 funded licensed PERT clinician positions regionally in FY 2019–20 (70 paired with law enforcement officers and 2 with EMS community paramedics). These clinicians conducted a total of 35,088 contacts in the community (responding to MH CFS, as well as other types of calls), and as a result provided 12,330 crisis interventions, diverted almost half (47%) of these from a 5150 hospital transport, and were able to warn 981 intended victims of violence through Tarasoff enactments (California law that provides therapists have a duty to protect or warn a third part if the therapist believes the patient poses a serious risk of inflicting serious bodily injury upon another).



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- conducted **35,088 contacts** in the community
- provided **12,330 crisis interventions**
- warned **981 intended victims** of violence

For additional information regarding the District Attorney's new diversion program, please visit danewscenter.com/news/funding-mental-health-diversion and for more information about the Community Research Foundation's (CRF) PERT program, please visit comresearch.org/pert.php. For additional resources in the community, including those related to mental health, call 2-1-1 or visit 211sandiego.org.

About infobits

SANDAG serves as the region's clearinghouse for information and data. InfoBits publish timely, relevant information informing the public while providing context on complex issues facing the region.

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