

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Police Interactions with Persons with Mental Illness

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2023

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“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

People in psychiatric care or in need of such care are commonly encountered by police. Unless known from the outset, the presence of these conditions may not be obvious to the responding officers. When police are called to respond to a call involving a mental health crisis, the potential volatility of the situation can result in tragic outcomes, including injury or death of the individual in distress, the responding officers, and others. Even with emerging mobile crisis models, increased scrutiny and public awareness of negative outcomes from the management by law enforcement of people in mental health crisis continue to necessitate that jurisdictions ensure adequate training, policies, and procedures to help improve police interactions with persons with mental illness.

APA Position:

It is the position of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) that the training of law enforcement officers who respond to mental health crisis events to broadly recognize mental disorders, including mental health and substance use disorders, is critical to safely deescalate situations, to prevent uses of physical force wherever possible, and to mitigate personal bias so they can perform equitably, safely, and successfully under stress. Furthermore, the deployment of law enforcement officers to respond to these mental health crises should only be used in those situations where safety-related issues require their presence.

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