

ASSESSMENT, SUPPORT And PREVENTION (ASAP)– OVERVIEW

In developing this program, Nebraska Region 6 Behavioral Healthcare prepared the guiding principles that served as the foundation on which to build a program that will guarantee individuals experiencing a mental health crisis the services and supports they deserve. Law enforcement officers and medical personnel are called into situations every day where they have to make decisions regarding the needs of individuals experiencing crises. The goal of the Assessment, Support And Prevention (ASAP) Team is to provide immediate assistance to individuals in crisis with mental illness and substance abuse disorders in Sarpy County, Nebraska and to ensure that they are served in the least restrictive, most normative setting possible. The aim is to connect individuals in crisis with community-based services prior to hospitalization and reduce recidivism rates of re-hospitalization. The point of entry to this service is through Law Enforcement or Hospital referral.

Intervention in mental health crisis is time-consuming under the best of situations. People in crisis are often not able to listen well, process information, or follow through. Assessment and resolution of a crisis require enough time to determine what is actually fueling it. While mental illness may be a primary cause, other issues may be escalating the situation.

Once the factors precipitating the crisis are understood, resolving them takes even longer. Some people need to ventilate for substantial periods, others require referrals to psychiatric services, food, clothing, housing, drug and alcohol services, and so on. If referrals are not made on the spot, it is unlikely that the individual will actually follow through with the referrals at a later time. If steps are skipped or rushed, any intervention is likely to be ineffective at best or result in an adverse outcome at worst. Law Enforcement and Medical staff attempting to resolve these issues are out of service and unable to respond to other issues while they are determining the best intervention to maintain an individual in a safe environment.

Although Law Enforcement and Medical staff receive some training in identifying symptoms of mental illness, this is not their area of expertise. In addition, individuals in crisis may be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs and may or may not have a co-occurring mental illness. Making an adequate assessment is very difficult in the community absent any treatment history or professional training.

Individuals and family members are often reluctant to involve law enforcement as an intervention in mental health crisis situations. Adverse outcomes loom large in people's minds even though they rarely occur. There may be a great deal of fear associated with the presence of uniformed officers, particularly for some immigrants. There may be frustration when officers are called for assistance and feel unable to take an individual to psychiatric treatment because they did not directly witness signs of danger to self or others, or grave disability. Additionally, there is stigma regarding long emergency room waits and "quick fix" care.

The mobile ASAP Team is a strategy focusing on wellness and recovery that provides for the time and resources required for effective crisis intervention. ASAP consists of Mental Health Practitioners trained in crisis intervention and communication, psychological reactions to crisis and trauma, traumatic stress, de-escalation techniques and information to provide community supportive referrals to area agencies/services. Integrating mental health staff with Law Enforcement and Medical personnel will optimize access to appropriate resources and reduce the stigma for those seeking treatment, as well as reduce unnecessary incarcerations and Emergency Protective Custody situations. The service allows for complimentary utilization of the strengths of mental health, law enforcement and/or medical professionals.

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The ASAP Team will provide ethnically and culturally appropriate mobile crisis screening to stabilize the mental health crisis; provide referrals with appropriate mental health, physical healthcare, substance abuse, and social services; to promote wellness and recovery; to increase social supports; to decrease isolation; and assist in the prevention of recurrent crisis situations, hospitalization and/or incarceration.

The ASAP team will respond to calls from Law Enforcement in the field and Medical providers in the ER needing mental health screening for an apparent mental health crisis and will provide referrals to all individuals who have come into contact with the team.

ASAP is about readiness, availability, professionals helping people, safety, and the reduction of Law Enforcement EPC's and Hospital protective holds. ASAP is a positive and realistic approach to crisis situations where people who are in personal crisis can be assisted through professional intervention to self-manage, control, and/or connect with community supports to overcome current critical personal issues. The teams will be committed to recovery and resiliency models. It is anticipated the program will reduce unnecessary trauma to consumers and family, avoid involuntary interventions, and reduce the utilization of higher levels of care via diversion and alternative crisis resolution. Thus, the program will support individuals in achieving crisis resolution in the least restrictive manner and setting.

ASAP team members will follow-up after their initial contact to conduct research based screenings and quality assurance programming. The person who was assisted may provide verbal feedback to assist the program maintain a high degree of professionalism and quality. This feedback will also provide the program a source for information about future growth, program modification, and/or adaptation.

Services will be mobile and provided 24/7/365 where the individual is experiencing the crisis. Some of the complicating factors that may be involved in the acute manifestation of the crisis include: medication noncompliance, use of non-prescribed substances, untreated physical illness, or psychosocial stress arising from homelessness, poverty, family conflict or other issues. Only a methodical screening of history and systems is likely to elicit the bigger picture and identify opportunities to intervene across multiple domains.

The program will recognize that recovery is a vision that incorporates the concept of resilience that respects an individual's capacity to resolve crises and return to a higher level of functioning. ASAP will adhere to the principles of recovery that include client directed referrals based on strengths and assets promoting self-determination in order to achieve the quality of life defined by the individual. Recovery and resiliency are facilitated by referral/access to needed mental health services, medical care, substance abuse services, safe affordable housing, supportive relationships and meaningful activities. This program will provide the referrals required to ensure that individuals know where to receive these supports and services.

This service is provided at no cost and participation is voluntary.