



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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"Community-based, person-centered approaches are central to our efforts to build an effective behavioral health crisis response system and ensure timely access to care. These locally driven, data-informed efforts to study crisis response complement the work underway at the state level to markedly strengthen our state's mental health care system and ensure all New Yorkers have access to these important services and supports when a behavioral health emergency arises."

Dr. Ann Marie T. Sullivan, Commissioner, Office of Mental Health, New York State

Partner Support Quotes

"The work being done by the City of Buffalo Police Department—especially through the Behavioral Health Teams—is incredibly valuable, both to our officers and to the community we serve. Our goal is to support individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis with compassion and care. Through the Crisis to Care Collaborative, we're strengthening that approach, enhancing our focus on de-escalation, and ensuring people are connected to the appropriate services when they need them most."

Alphonso Wright, Commissioner, City of Buffalo Police Department

"Value Network is excited to support this collaborative effort to strengthen the mental health crisis system. Working to connect individuals experiencing a mental health crisis to the appropriate level of care during and after a crisis is essential, saving valuable staff time, and decreasing health care costs. We look forward to this leadership group addressing systemic issues to ensure accountability across the mental health crisis system".

Andrea J. Wanat, Chief Executive Officer, Value Network

"Participating in the Crisis to Care Collaborative enables us to build stronger relationships with mental health professionals, leading to more effective and compassionate responses."

Brian Cosgrove, Chief, Town of West Seneca Police Department

"Through the Crisis to Care Collaborative, we're enhancing our emergency response protocols to ensure that behavioral health crises are met with the right resources and support, improving outcomes for all involved."

Brian Ross, Commissioner of Central Police Services, Erie County



crisis to care
COLLABORATIVE

"Our first responders—especially our Behavioral Health Teams in the Buffalo Police Department—are doing remarkable work, and with this new initiative, they'll now be able to engage with additional partners to provide more comprehensive, coordinated care for those in crisis. The Crisis to Care Collaborative is about creating the system our community deserves: one that is compassionate, coordinated, and built to respond effectively when someone is in crisis. It builds on the strong work already underway in the City of Buffalo and Erie County, bringing it together through innovative and unified solutions that better serve our residents. I want to thank Erie County and their team, the Buffalo Police Department, Erie County Sheriff's Office, ECMC, and all of our partners for their commitment to this critical effort."

Christopher P. Scanlon, City of Buffalo Mayor

"Reshaping our emergency response system to prioritize timely, compassionate care for individuals in crisis is crucial. I am honored to contribute to the Crisis to Care Collaborative as we seek to implement more effective, health-focused approaches to mental health needs in our communities."

Colleen Kristich, Senior Community Researcher, Partnership for Public Good – Community Responder Coalition

"The Crisis to Care Collaborative is a critical step forward in how Erie County responds to behavioral health emergencies. By working together, we're building a system that treats mental health crises with urgency, compassion, and care."

Elizabeth Mauro, President and CEO, Endeavor Health Services

"BestSelf is proud to be a leading partner in the Crisis to Care initiative, transforming how Erie County responds to behavioral health emergencies," said Liz Woike, President and CEO of BestSelf. "The upcoming launch of our BestResponse Intensive Crisis Center will provide immediate care for those in acute mental health or substance use crises. We're deeply grateful to the Lee Foundation for their generous support in making this possible."

Elizabeth Woike, President & CEO, BestSelf Behavioral Health

"For over 70 years, BryLin Hospital has proudly served the Western New York community, advocating for and raising awareness about those experiencing behavioral health crises in our community. We are honored to be part of the Crisis to Care Collaborative, an initiative that perfectly aligns with our mission to provide exceptional care while advocating for the mental health needs of our community."

Eric Pleskow, CEO, BryLin Hospital

"At the Patrick P. Lee Foundation, we believe philanthropy has a unique ability to bring people together across sectors to tackle complex challenges like mental health. By convening partners, funding innovative approaches, and driving collaboration, we can help build a crisis response system that truly meets the needs of our community."

Jane Mogavero, Esq., Executive Director, Patrick P. Lee Foundation



"NAMI Buffalo & Western New York is proud to be part of the Crisis to Care Collaborative, an initiative that directly aligns with our mission to support, educate, and advocate for all individuals and families impacted by mental illness. It is an honor to collaborate with partners across many sectors to build this innovative system that will improve crisis response and ensure safe, effective, and appropriate mental health care for all."

Jeffrey Pirrone, CEO, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Buffalo & Erie County

"Working alongside so many integrated partners dedicated to addressing the growing behavioral health crisis in our region is truly inspiring. Recovery Options Made Easy (ROME) is honored to have been an active member of the initiative since its inception. I look forward to seeing the positive and systemic impact the Crisis to Care Collaborative will have on our community."

Jennifer Levesque, CEO, Recovery Options Made Easy (ROME)

"Since 1968, Crisis Services has delivered around-the-clock crisis support to our community. Effective crisis care depends on a system that is connected, collaborative, and responsive to changing needs. Through the Crisis to Care Collaborative, we're able to align roles across the crisis response continuum, helping us extend care more effectively and ensuring those in crisis receive timely, appropriate support."

Jessica Pirro, LMSW, President/CEO, Crisis Services

"Our participation in the Crisis to Care Collaborative underscores our dedication to ensuring that individuals in crisis receive appropriate care, reducing reliance on law enforcement as the default response."

Hon. John Garcia, Erie County Sheriff

"Through the Collaborative, we're implementing strategies that prioritize mental health support to reduce unnecessary incarceration, fostering better outcomes for our community members."

Justin Haag, Lieutenant, Town of Cheektowaga Police Department

"Given how the response system is structured, improvements will only be achieved if there is collaboration across sectors and systems. The Crisis to Care Collaborative brings together over 50 stakeholders from diverse organizations—many of whom work directly in crisis response every day—to find better ways to respond to behavioral health crises and improve how care is delivered in our community."

Lisa Chimera, Deputy County Executive, Erie County

"The passion behind the Crisis to Care Collaborative is driven by a shared commitment to ensuring no one faces a behavioral health crisis alone. By improving our response system, this initiative will provide immediate, compassionate care and help transform how we support those in need."

Melinda Dubois, Executive Director, Mental Health Advocates of WNY (MHA)



"Addressing mental health from a human-first standpoint is an effort that requires collaboration between all parts of our community, including mental health, behavioral health, law enforcement, crisis response, hospitals, and community resources. The Crisis to Care Collaborative has opened doors to connecting people with the services that will best help them in the moment and connect them to support that helps them thrive. We are excited about the positive impact this initiative will have on our community."

Rachel Martin, Chief Marketing Officer, Restoration Society, Inc.

"The Crisis to Care Collaborative brings together a diverse coalition of partners through a joint commitment to accountability. We are building a system where every stakeholder shares responsibility for ensuring people in crisis are met with care, not confusion—and where outcomes are measured, not assumed."

Sarah Bonk, LMSW, Commissioner of Mental Health, Erie County

"Our team is on the ground, responding to individuals experiencing a behavioral health crisis, and we see firsthand the challenges they face. Through the Crisis to Care Collaborative, we have the opportunity to drive meaningful change—improving how we respond to those in crisis and ensuring we provide the best possible care in those critical moments."

Scott Karaszewski, Chief EMS Officer, AMR

"The launch of the Crisis to Care Collaborative comes at a critical time for Erie County. At least once every three hours, an ambulance or police car from Buffalo arrives at ECMC with someone experiencing a mental health emergency. In 2024 alone, we treated an estimated 10,000 individuals at CPEP. Our dedicated team works around the clock to support those experiencing a behavioral health crisis—whether brought in by first responders or arriving on their own. However, many individuals are unable to receive care because they do not meet CPEP's clinical criteria, leaving them without support at a crucial moment and deepening their distrust in a system that should be there to help."

Thomas Quatroche, Jr., Ph.D., CEO, ECMC

"Supporting the Collaborative aligns with our commitment to advancing mental health initiatives that are data-driven, community-informed, and focused on long-term solutions for individuals and families."

Tracy Sawicki, Executive Director, Peter & Elizabeth Tower Foundation

"As first responders, we are frequently called upon to assist individuals experiencing behavioral health crises. Too often, we see these individuals underserved by a system that is not fully equipped to meet their needs. The Crisis to Care Collaborative represents a critical step toward creating a more coordinated, compassionate, and responsive system—one that ensures individuals receive appropriate care promptly, while enabling our teams to remain available for other emergencies throughout the community."

William Renaldo, Commissioner, City of Buffalo Fire Department