

P.E.R.T.

Psychiatric Emergency Response Team

Community Information

Introduction & History of PERT

Who is PERT?

- The Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT), a program of Community Research Foundation (CRF), a not-for-profit organization, in partnership with San Diego County Health and Human Services (HHSA), San Diego County Law Enforcement Agencies, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI San Diego). The purpose of the PERT program is to contribute to the well-being of individuals living with mental illness by actively and compassionately assisting individuals in crisis who come to the attention of law enforcement to access appropriate services and to optimize outcomes through on-scene assessments and referrals. The PERT program is funded by the County of San Diego HHSA and the MHSA act. The PERT program is a law enforcement based mental health crisis intervention team that pairs a licensed mental health professional with a law enforcement officer/deputy. The teams ride together in the field for their entire shift and are first responders who assist in mental health related emergencies that are brought to law enforcements attention.

Why have PERT?

- In the early 1990's, there were several officer involved shootings and critical incidents involving individuals living with mental illness. At that time, there was a gap between law enforcement and mental health agencies and providers. The community, consumers, family members, San Diego County HHSA and law enforcement agencies determined that officers/deputies needed to have more training in recognizing and responding to mental health issues and in addition to the training, needed clinical support from mental health professionals in the field. The PERT program is the result of our community partners collaborating and working together to provide the best possible service for individuals living with mental illness and to also provide training and support to law enforcement agencies throughout our County.

What is the goal of the PERT Program?

- The mission of the PERT program is to provide effective and compassionate crisis intervention to individuals living with mental illness in the community who come into contact with law enforcement officers/deputies. The goal is to safely and effectively de-escalate crisis situations and provide appropriate referrals when necessary and offer the least restrictive level of care, thus avoiding unnecessary hospitalization and incarceration. PERT is recognized globally as a “best practice” model. This model allows law enforcement agencies and PERT clinicians to work together with the common goal of providing the best options for individuals living with mental illness in our communities.

What is the staffing of the PERT program?

- We are authorized to provide seventy-two licensed mental health professionals who are teamed with PERT trained law enforcement officers/deputies throughout San Diego County. PERT partner agencies include the following: Oceanside Police Department, National City Police Department, Carlsbad Police Department, Escondido Police Department, Chula Vista Police Department, Coronado Police Department, La Mesa Police Department, El Cajon Police Department, Escondido Police Department, San Diego Sheriff's Department, and San Diego Police Department. PERT provides assistance to other agencies such as California Highway Patrol, U.S. Customs & Border Protection, Harbor Police, as well as campus and military police when requested and available.

How do you request a PERT team?

- The community may access a PERT team by contacting law enforcement's 9-1-1 system in cases of emergencies or calling their local law enforcement agencies non-emergency phone line. Officers/deputies will then be dispatched evaluate the situation and the first officers on-scene may request a PERT team, if necessary. The communication center may dispatch a PERT team directly if appropriate and/or available. If you are told that a PERT team is not available, please request a PERT trained officer/deputy to respond to your call. These officers have attended the PERT Academy training and have experience responding to calls involving mental health crises.

What happens once a PERT team responds to a call?

- The officer/deputy will assess the situation in regards to safety for the officer, the PERT Clinician, the consumer, and bystanders. The officer/deputy will provide safety on scene at all times. The officer/deputy will evaluate the subject for any criminal behavior, as appropriate.
- The PERT Clinician assists the consumer by completing a mental health screening, obtaining relevant psychiatric and substance abuse history, (may obtain information from family and other professionals providing care to the consumer, if appropriate) and will formulate and recommend a course of action.
- The officer/deputy and PERT Clinician will offer referrals or other assistance as the situation warrants, and if needed will assist the individual to the appropriate setting (either voluntarily or involuntarily). PERT is able to avoid hospitalization and incarceration in the majority of cases in which there is intervention.

What kind of training is provided by PERT?

- 24-hour POST certified PERT Academy for law enforcement.
- 8-hour POST certified PERT Academy for law enforcement
- 10-hour quarterly training for officers/deputies and clinicians
- Training provided at the Regional Law Enforcement Academy
- Agency requested training, including line-up or briefing training
- Community events and presentations provided throughout the County.

What are the benefits of a PERT team?

- A potential decrease in the number and frequency of use of force situations between law enforcement and persons with mental illness.
- More efficient and effective care for persons with mental illness who come into contact with law enforcement.
- Allows non-PERT officers/deputies to return to the field quickly while the PERT team facilitates the coordination of care for persons, which is often a lengthy and time consuming situation.
- A decrease in the number of persons taken to hospital Emergency Departments and to the San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital (CMH-EPU) by providing crisis intervention in the field and making appropriate referrals and connections to community resources.
- Provide follow-up services on a case-by-case basis, to support the decreased number of calls for service and connect consumers to the services they need.

What are some of the limitations of PERT?

- PERT does not provide case management or individual treatment.
- PERT clinicians do not respond to calls for service without an officer/deputy.
- PERT does not prescribe, deliver or administer medications.
- PERT is not available 24-hours a day due to staffing limitations. If a PERT clinician is needed and there is not one currently on duty in that particular department, the on-scene officer/deputy may request a PERT unit from a nearby jurisdiction. If one is not available, the officer/deputy may submit a PERT Referral Form for later follow-up by that department's PERT team when they are available.
- PERT does not perform emergency crisis negotiations – (They are not Emergency/Crisis Negotiators or Hostage Negotiators). These calls are volatile and dangerous and need to be handled by law enforcement until they are safely resolved. PERT may be used to support ENT/CNT teams by accessing and providing mental health history and relevant information to the negotiators.