



Public Health
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Frederick County Health Department

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A message from the Local Behavioral Health Authority:

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From gaps to guardrails: a community approach to crisis response

What happens when someone in Frederick County is in crisis — not a crime-in-progress, but a moment of deep despair, confusion, or danger?

For decades, the answer was vague at best: Call 911, hope someone understands, and pray the system doesn't make things worse.

But that's changing. And it's not by accident.

Over the past 10 years, the Local Behavioral Health Authority has been steadily transforming how Frederick County responds to behavioral health emergencies.

The old system had gaps. Big ones.

A child in distress might end up in an ER waiting room for hours or even days. An adult in a suicidal spiral could be met by police officers who don't have behavioral health training. A parent might not know who to call at all.

So, we built guardrails. We've built a comprehensive, 24/7 crisis response system designed to catch people before they fall and to treat every call as a human life, not just a dispatch.

We now have mobile crisis teams that respond in real time — day or night — with trained mental health professionals. We created a walk-in crisis center that welcomes individuals and families without judgment or delay.

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We've partnered with law enforcement, fire and rescue, emergency management, and community-based providers to make sure that every responding partner knows their role, and no one who needs help falls through the cracks.

This is what public health looks like in action. Not just policy. Not just programs. A full system that moves fast, works across silos, and treats people with dignity during their most vulnerable moments.

But we haven't stopped there.

We know how valuable it is for people to talk to someone who shares their experience, so we have embedded peer recovery support specialists in fire and rescue partnerships.

We've launched harm reduction programs, suicide prevention campaigns, and academic detailing to help local doctors and prescribers respond to behavioral health issues with care instead of stigma.

We've also worked to educate local businesses, the faith-based community and providers on how to foster Positive Childhood Experiences, or PCEs. Go to Health.FrederickCountyMD.gov/PCE.

We've also invested in upstream prevention — from an award-winning, nationally recognized school-based art therapy program called Kids Like Us to our public health initiative called Be There to Care, which focuses on suicide prevention, community outreach and education and safe firearm storage.

These are the small, steady buffers that build resilience: one stable relationship, one safe space, one trusted adult at a time.

Frederick County is now seen as a leader in Maryland for how we coordinate across systems, respond to crises, and create real-time solutions. Other counties call us for guidance. State officials ask us to present our model.

But we know the work is far from done.

We're still fighting for sustainable funding, especially for law enforcement-assisted diversion and long-term crisis intervention services.

We're still working to ensure our legal and judicial systems are aligned with behavioral health goals, so that people in pain are met with help, not handcuffs.



And we're still trying to make sure our programs reach those most at risk: youth, veterans, individuals struggling with substance use, and families trying to hold it all together.

This isn't easy work. But it's vital.

Every person in crisis deserves a response that is compassionate, fast, and effective. And every community member, whether you're a parent, teacher, business owner, or neighbor has a role to play.

Here's what you can do:

- Learn the local resources. The crisis walk-in center is open 24/7. The mobile crisis team can be reached by dialing 988.
- Reduce stigma. Mental health challenges are common. Talking about them shouldn't be taboo.
- Get trained in Narcan administration. You could save a life before help arrives. Go to Health.FrederickCountyMD.gov/ORT.

What we've built in Frederick County is a model — not just for Maryland, but for any community that wants to move from fragmented responses to a unified system of care.

It took leadership. It took listening. It took people willing to do things differently.

Most of all, it took the belief that every life is worth protecting. Let's keep building.

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