

TEACHING  
HOSPITALS  
of TEXAS

## Improving Care While Reducing ER Use and Arrests for Individuals Experiencing Mental Health Crises

Parkland Health, Dallas Fire-Rescue, and Dallas Police Department  
respond to mental health crisis calls together with RIGHT Care

### PARTNERS IN IMPROVING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE

Texas' teaching and public hospitals have an instrumental role in the state's health care system. From teaching and training future health care professionals to creating and deploying programs to address health care challenges in their communities, these hospitals are essential for meeting the broad and varied care needs of the state's growing population.

While these hospitals are not dedicated behavioral health hospitals, their emergency departments are often the front door for those needing behavioral health care, and their shared mission of providing timely, cost-effective care means that many are taking on the responsibility of investing in behavioral health care programs and services. The significant human and financial investments in these programs are evidence of their commitment to being prudent financial stewards and to serving their communities.

This series profiles some of the innovative programs and services that Texas' teaching and public hospitals are deploying to make behavioral health care timelier and more accessible for Texans of all ages and from all walks of life -- children, adolescents, adults, seniors, veterans, those with serious and persistent mental illness, the unhoused, and those involved in the criminal justice system. Most of these programs and services are in partnership with local community-based organizations, and all deeply reflect the community's priorities and needs. Many also have vital financial support from the Texas Legislature or their cities and counties.

### Community Health Needs Assessment and 9-1-1 Data Drive a New Response to Mental Health Crisis

Parkland Health, a public hospital district health system, regularly conducts community health needs assessments (CHNA) to document the health status of Dallas County and to support planning and policy initiatives to improve population health. The CHNA consistently finds that residents of South Dallas experience more barriers to health, such as lack of transportation, have inconsistent insurance coverage, have poorer health outcomes, and are medically underserved.

Mental health is a frequently mentioned unmet need. 9-1-1 call data also reveal that zip codes in South Dallas have the highest number of mental health crisis calls. In addition, Parkland Health, already the busiest emergency department in the country, had seen its volume of patients seeking emergent behavioral health care steadily increasing.

In response to these data, Dallas Fire-Rescue, the Dallas Police Department, and Parkland Health, with support from the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, and funding from the W.W. Caruth, Jr. Foundation at Communities Foundation of Texas, came together in 2018 to create the Rapid Integrated Group Health Care Team, known as RIGHT Care.

Originally a pilot program, RIGHT Care was launched in January 2018 to cover one of Dallas' seven police districts in South Central Dallas with a multi-disciplinary response to 9-1-1 mental health calls from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.



Parkland



RIGHT Care provides rapid 9-1-1 response to mental health emergency calls with the goal of appropriately diverting patients from area emergency rooms and jails and connecting people to a more appropriate level of care. A Parkland psychiatric social worker, Dallas Police Department officer, and paramedic from Dallas Fire-Rescue respond to mental health crisis calls as a coordinated unit, providing on-the-scene intervention and resources to those experiencing mental health distress.

RIGHT Care team members attend a tailored 2-day training, which includes a review of the policy and procedures, team building, and scenarios the team might encounter. The training also includes an 8-hour Mental Health First Aid course. In addition, the social workers all attend an annual 8-hour Satori Alternatives to Managing Aggression program, which is required for all behavioral health direct care employees of Parkland Health to learn de-escalation tactics. Each RIGHT Care team member has a specific response role. The police officer assesses the scene for safety, victimization, and criminal activity. The paramedic conducts a thorough medical evaluation and determines if a medical emergency exists. If the police officer and paramedic determine the individual does not require arrest or ambulance transfer to the hospital for an acute medical condition or medical emergency, the Parkland Health psychiatric social worker conducts a definitive mental health evaluation to assess needs and to determine what sort of mental health or social services or resources might be helpful. If the individual's mental health symptoms are so severe that an emergency detention is required, the individual will be transferred to the nearest psychiatric facility.

If the social worker determines the symptoms are not severe, he or she will talk to family members or others at the scene to get collateral information on medication use, missed appointments, or housing situation, for example, to inform needed service linkages and appointments. Together, the RIGHT Care team also provides on-scene crisis de-escalation and stabilization in place.

To help connect an individual with timely and appropriate care and resources, RIGHT Care has partnerships with the North Texas Behavioral Health Authority to get medications re-filled as well as with outpatient clinics, such as Metrocare Services and Child & Family Guidance Center, to get a same-day appointment with a clinician. It also has partnerships with food pantries and housing organizations. Proactive community outreach and intervention includes follow-up services to check on patients to ensure they are seeing their mental health provider, taking their medicine, have transportation to get to their doctor appointments, and removing any other barriers to care that are identified.





## Program Impact Drives RIGHT Care's Expansion

In the first 18 months of the pilot program, RIGHT Care teams responded to more than 4,000 mental health calls in the Dallas South Central police district. The teams made arrests for new offenses in fewer than 2 percent of cases and successfully diverted about 900 people from emergency departments and just under 500 people from jail. RIGHT Care also was associated with a 9 percent decrease in arrests in the South Central district compared to the previous year, and an 11 percent reduction compared to citywide arrests over the same time period. In addition, while Parkland saw an overall increase in mental health cases in 2018, there was a nearly 10 percent decline in the volume of patients at Parkland's Psychiatric ED from the specific zip codes served by RIGHT Care. Comparing pre-launch data from 2017 with post-launch data in 2019, overall ER psychiatry volume increased by 30 percent, while ER arrivals from zip codes covered by RIGHT Care teams dropped 20 percent.

RIGHT Care's success and impact led the City of Dallas and Parkland Health to significantly expand the program in 2021 to cover the entire city. Today, RIGHT Care teams cover all seven of the city's police districts with 24/7 operations. Current staffing includes:

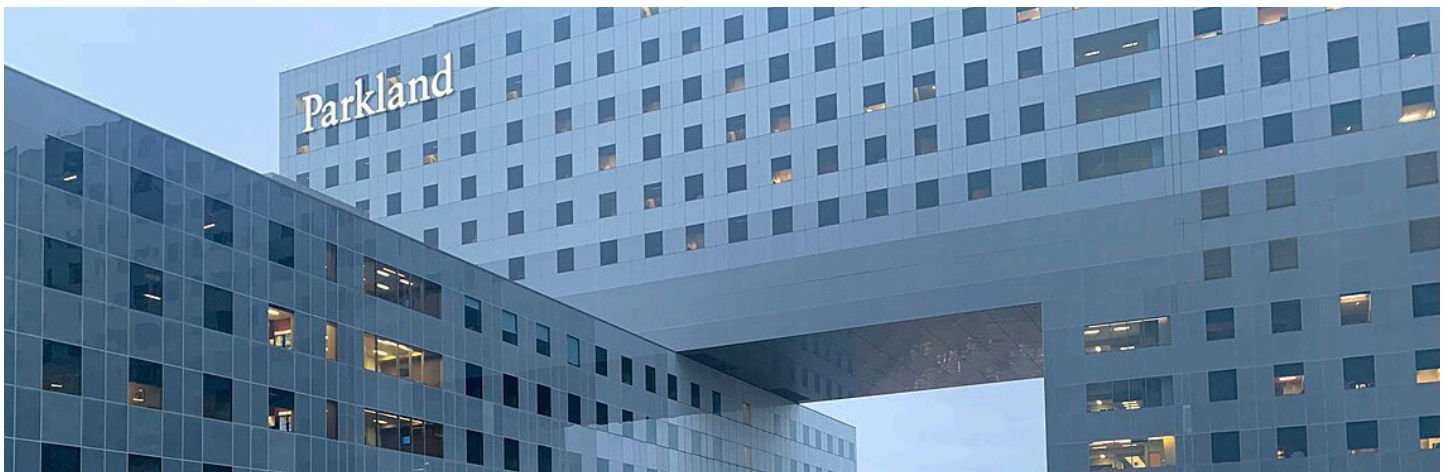
- 7 a.m.-3 p.m., seven teams
- 3 p.m. -11p.m., nine teams
- 11p.m. - 7a.m., two teams

**"A behavioral health crisis requires more than a police response. Over the last six years, RIGHT Care has demonstrated again and again that more people can be helped effectively with in-the-field, multidisciplinary response."**

**Kurtis Young, MSSW, LCSW**  
Senior director of social work  
Parkland Health



Today, funding from Parkland Health, the Parkland Health Foundation, and the City of Dallas support the program. The teams had 13,442 encounters involving 7,377 individuals in fiscal year 2023. Approximately 5,200 were appropriately diverted from the hospital with on-the-scene help and intervention, and just 470 were arrested. Emergency detentions at Parkland have decreased consistently year over year, dropping 23 percent between November 2020 to November 2021 and 16 percent between February 2021 and February 2022.



As another indicator of its success, the RIGHT Care program fields numerous requests for technical assistance and guidance from other jurisdictions seeking an alternative to a law enforcement-only response to mental health crises. In addition, within Dallas County, the local transit system, DART, is in the Beta phase of implementing a version of RIGHT Care, called DART Cares. Partnering a DART police officer, paramedic, and Parkland Health psychiatric social worker, teams are located at select DART stations to provide assessments and interventions for riders experiencing mental health issues. Funded through DART, the program is currently seeing about 150-200 encounters a month.



## About THOT

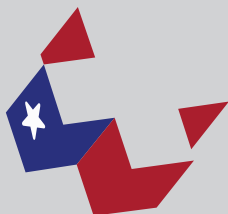
Founded in 1986, THOT is the principal voice and advocate for health systems that teach the next generation of health professionals and who are united in their commitment to support policies and funding that will ensure health care access for all Texans.

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