

**MULTIDISCIPLINARY
RESPONSE TEAMS IN
CRISIS RESPONSE LAID
THE FOUNDATION FOR
THE FIRST
MULTIDISCIPLINARY
FIRST RESPONDER
PEER SUPPORT TEAM
DURING THE HILL
COUNTRY FLOODS.**



Introductions



Kellie Burnam
Division Chief, Peer Support
Texas Division of Emergency
Management



Andrew Estrada
VP of Crisis Response
CHCS



Walter Ball
Assistant Chief/MIST
Boerne FD/EMTF



Janet Garcia
Clinical Administrator
CHCS



SENSITIVE CONTENT



The following presentation contains real-world response images and discussion from the **2025 Hill Country flood incident**, and some may be **difficult to view**.



Please take care of yourself
and step away as needed.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES



Upon completion, participant will be able to identify ways community partners can **build on existing collaborative efforts**.



Upon completion, participant will be able to identify ways multidisciplinary partners can establish **new and innovative collaborative efforts**.



Upon completion, participant will be able to identify how their LMHA can **get involved** with the Multi-Disciplinary First Responder Peer Support team.



Discuss Texas House Bill 35 and current and **future plans** for the Statewide Peer Support Network.

STRAC

Southwest Texas Regional Advisory Council

Mission: To reduce death / disability related to trauma, disaster, and *acute illness* through implementation of *well-planned and coordinated regional emergency response systems*.



22 COUNTIES
26,000 SQUARE MILES



3M PEOPLE



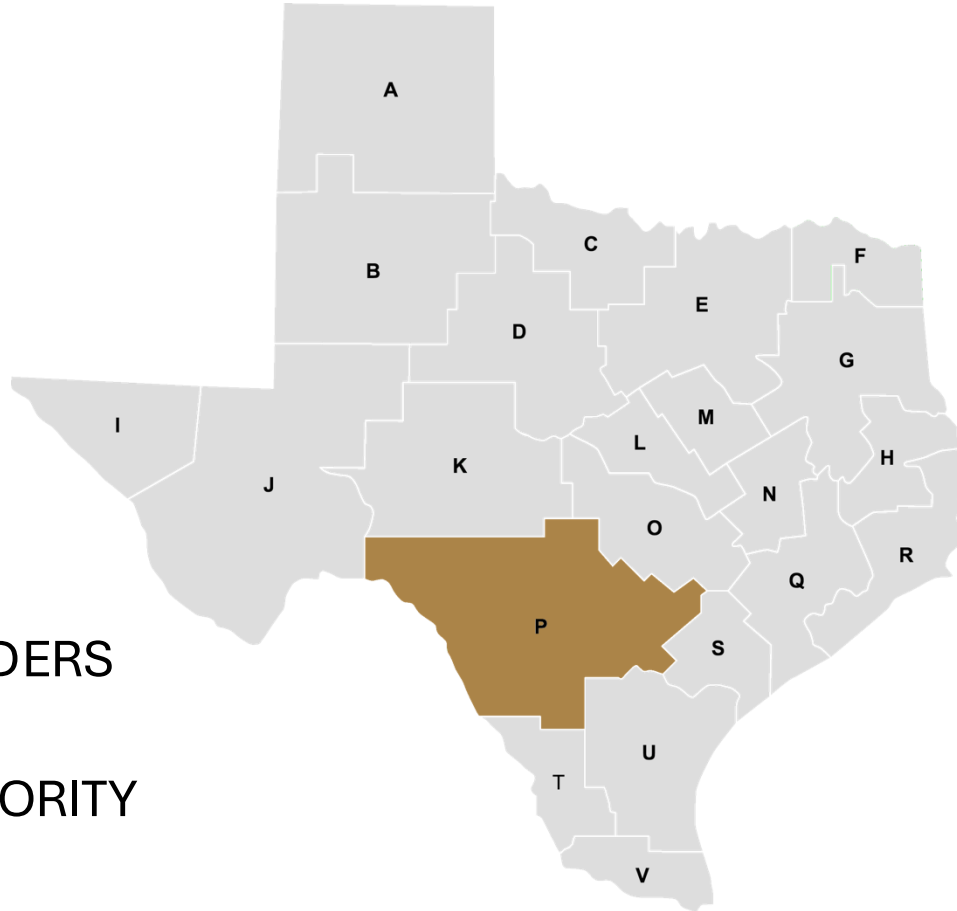
71 EMS AGENCIES



4 AIR MEDICAL PROVIDERS



PUBLIC HEALTH AUTHORITY



63 HOSPITALS



2 LVL I TRAUMA CENTERS



16 CARDIAC CENTERS



17 STROKE CENTERS



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

STRAC Organization

Acute Care

- Trauma/Cardiac/Stroke
- EMS and EMS Medical Directors
- Air Medical
- Pediatric
- MIH
- Perinatal
- MEDCOM
- EMS EMR
- Clinical Registries

Behavioral Health

- Southwest Texas Crisis Collaborative Steering Committee
- Law Enforcement Navigation
- Homeless Acute Care
- ER Crisis Transfer
- Social Determinants of Health
- Data Collection

Emergency Preparedness & Response

- Healthcare Coalition
- Regional Medical Operations Center
- Rescue Team
- Logistics
- EMTF
- Disaster IT
- Patient Tracking
- AssetTrak

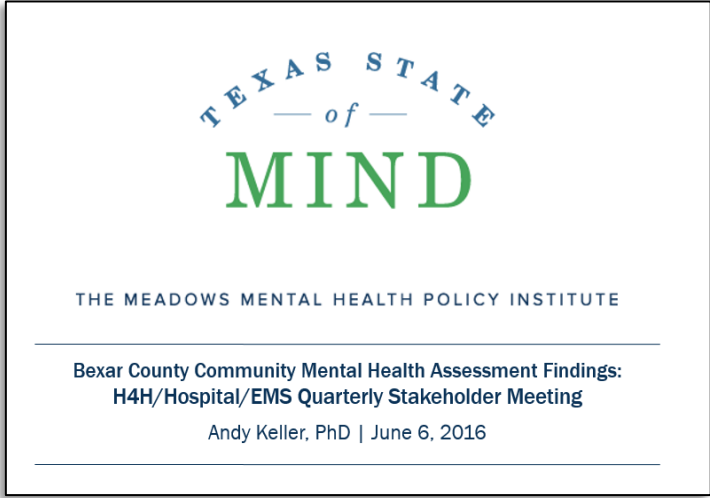
Southwest Texas Crisis Collaborative



- Haven for Hope opened 2010
- Spans over 30 acres
- Primary Care Clinic on campus
- Evenings, limited access to care
- SAFD #1 location for 911 calls



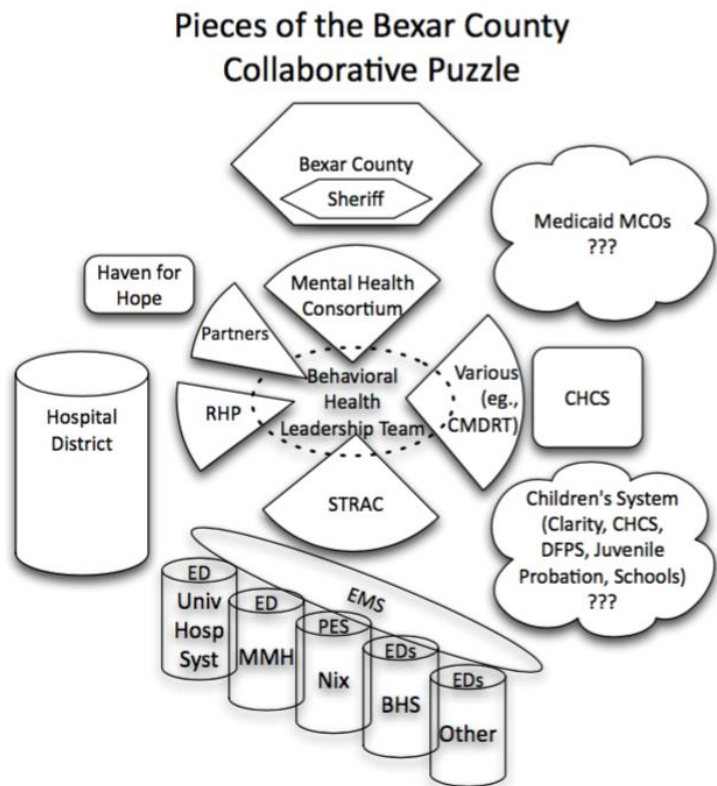
- Emergency Detentions taken to ER's
- Patient boarding problems
- Only half needed medical treatment
- Not best place for treatment



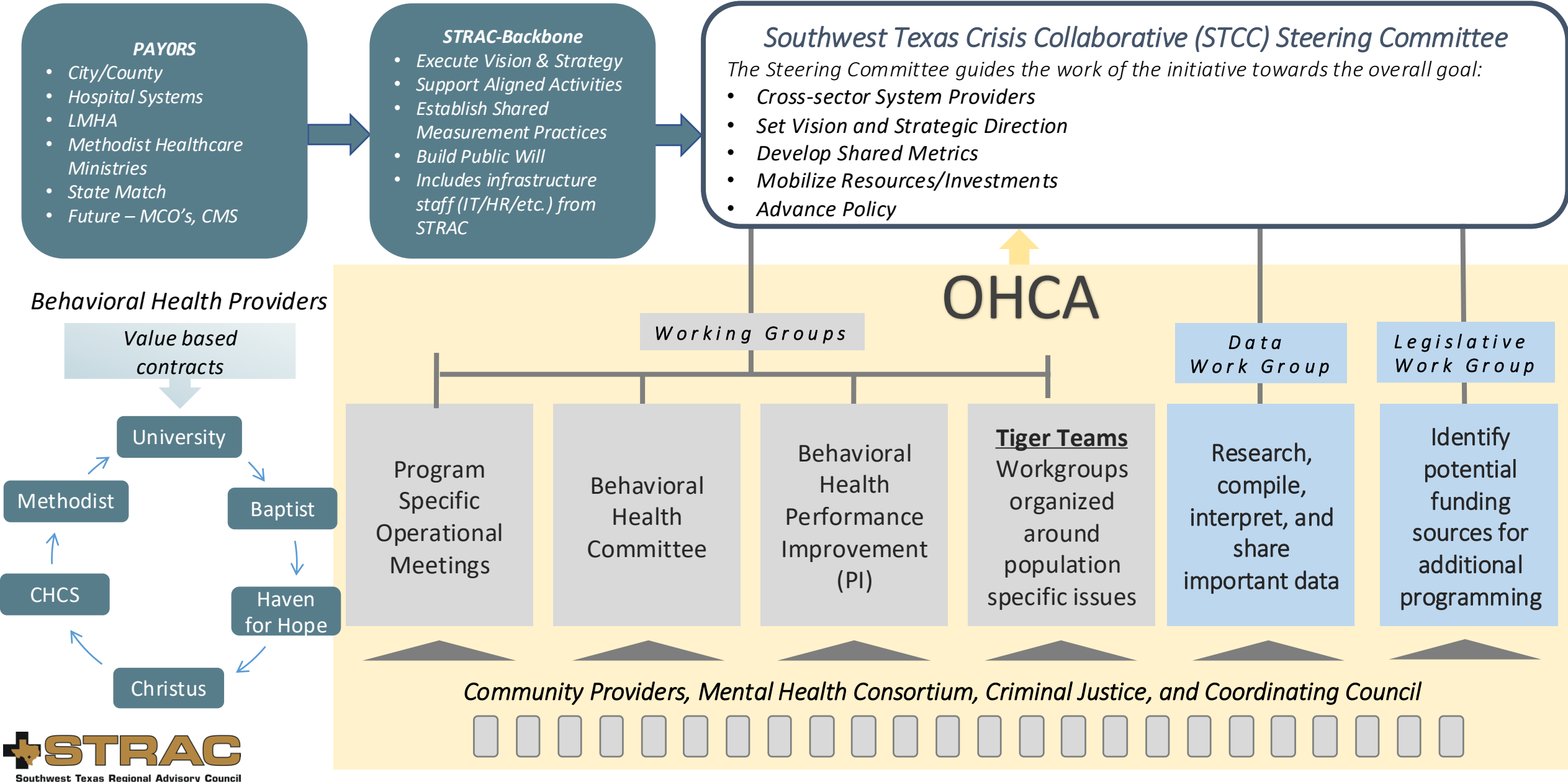
- Capability study of Behavioral Health for Bexar County
- Commissioned and funded by MHM
- Numerous findings, most notably:

2015

- ★ Cross-payer effort must be developed for **assertive and intensive ongoing services** for the highest utilizers of:
 - Jail
 - Crisis
 - Homeless
 - Emergency Response System
 - Emergency Room
 - Inpatient Care

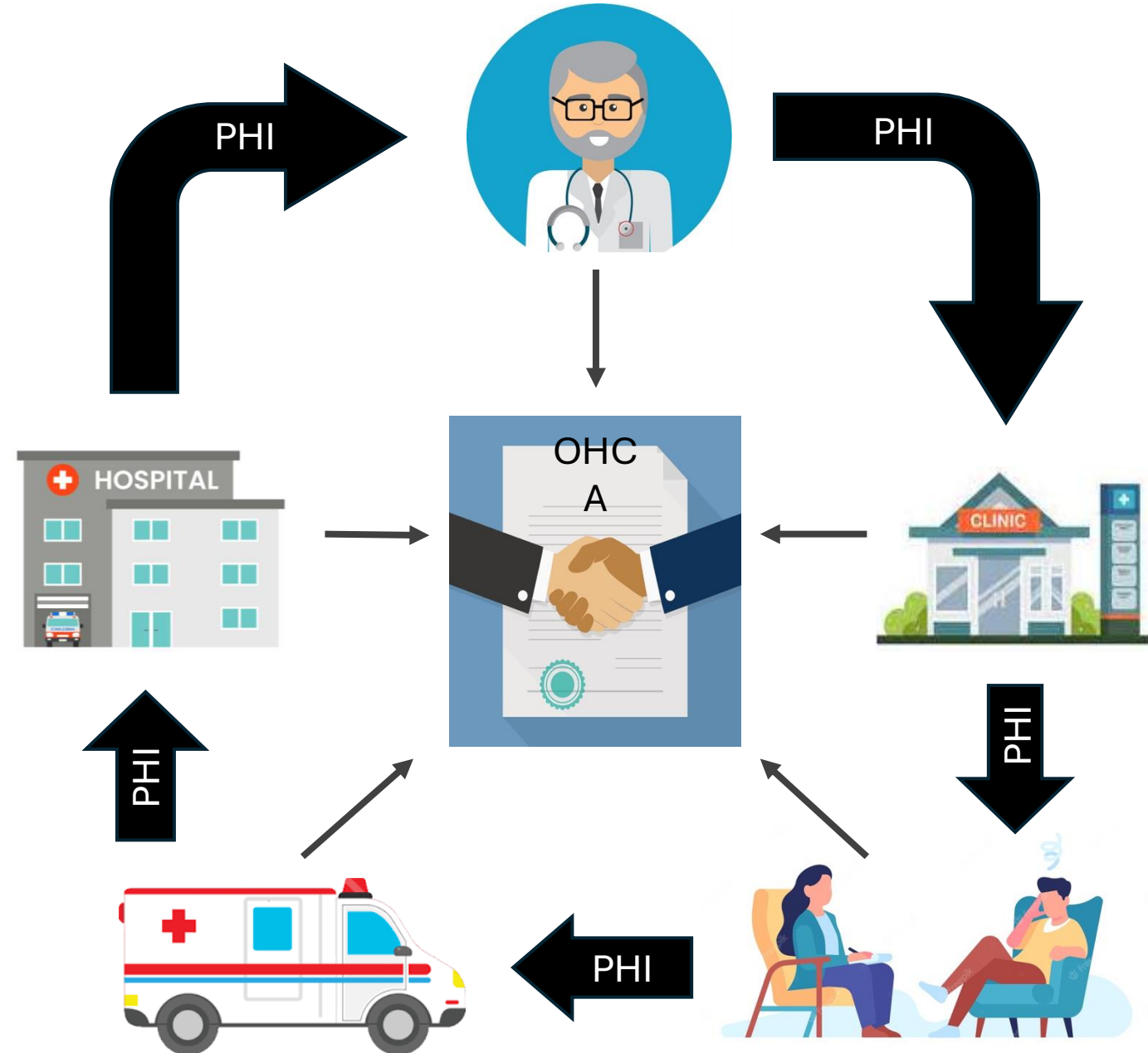


Integrated System of Care



Organized Healthcare Arrangement (OHCA)

- Can be implemented in an organized system of health care in which organizations participate in joint activities and participate in formal quality improvement and quality assessment activities.
- Allows participating covered entity organizations to share protected health information on mutual patients when participating in joint programming.
- Includes a participation agreement document, a policies and procedures manual, as well as an OHCA advisory board that meets annually and requires a majority to amend the agreement.



Southwest Texas Crisis Collaborative Programs

Navigation



Law Enforcement
Navigation



Substance Use
Emergency
Response



Haven for Hope
Acute Care Station



Contract Bed
Navigation



Hospital &
Transitional Liaisons



Domestic
Violence
Navigation Line

Response

SA & CORE
Community Outreach & Resiliency Effort

S.M.A.R.T.
Specialized Multidisciplinary Alternate Response Team



Program for
Intensive Care
Coordination (PICC)



Multi-Agency Partnership
for Stabilization (MAPS)

Supportive



Transitional
Housing



Policy
Advisors



Julota (SDoH
Platform)



Third Party
Consultants

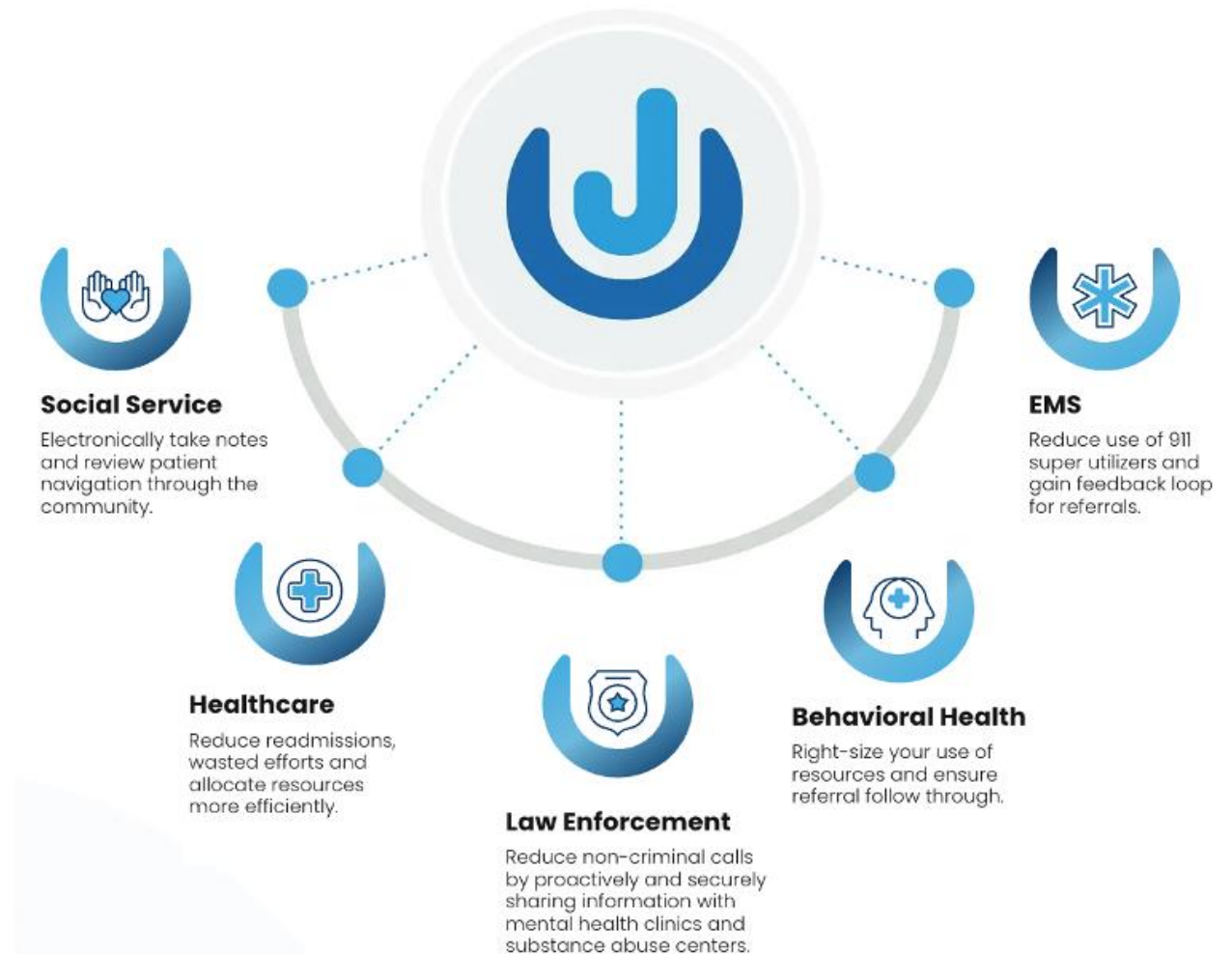


Data
Collection



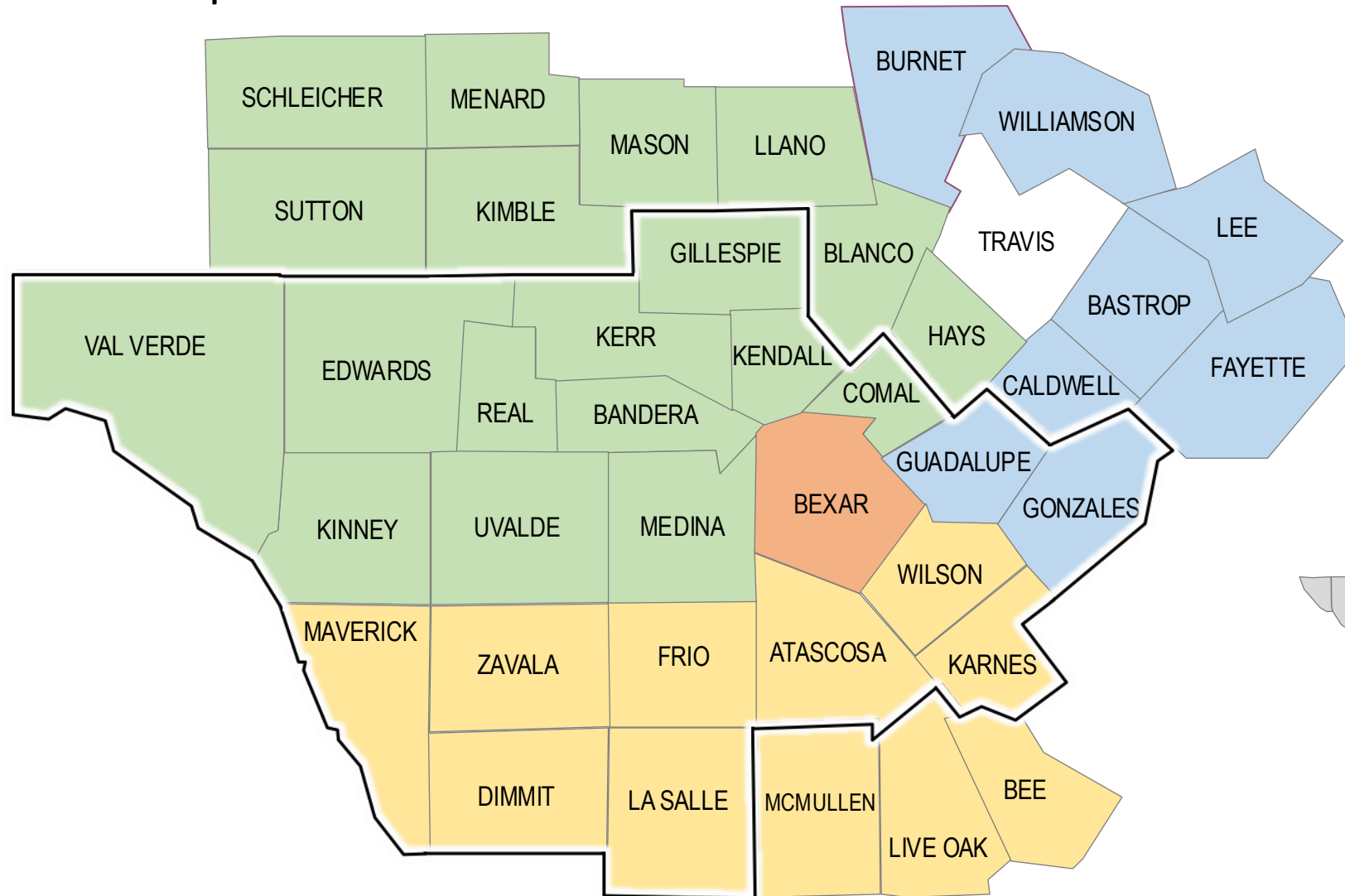
Connecting Your Community

- Interoperability platform to connect various data systems for agencies across the care continuum that address needs of community members
- Collaborative data sharing that is protected by HIPAA, 42 CFR Part 2, and CJIS
- Longitudinal record of care across all partner agencies for each individual served
- Workflow automations to increase productivity and efficiency in program management



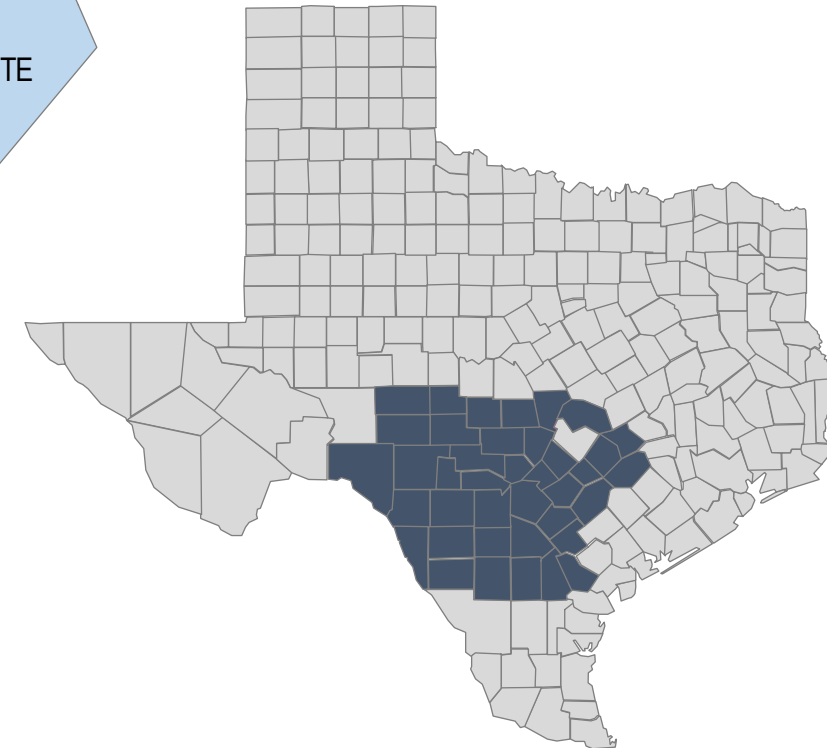
Local Mental Health Authorities

LMHA Overlap with TSA-P



LMHA Map Legend

- Hill Country MHDD
- Center for Health Care Services
- Bluebonnet Trails Community Services
- Camino Real Community Services
- STRAC (TSA-P) Region

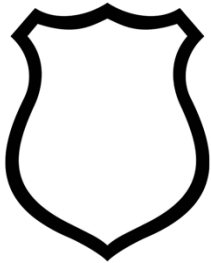


Multidisciplinary Teams



- What are Multidisciplinary Teams?
- Why are they helpful to First Responders, Patients and Consumers?

Multidisciplinary Team Roles



MHU (LE) Role

- Make initial contact with individual
- Secure the scene and assure scene stays safe during entire call
- Perform Emergency Detention or courtesy rides if necessary



Paramedic Role

- Provide complete medical assessment of individual
- Provide on scene safety assessment of environment if necessary

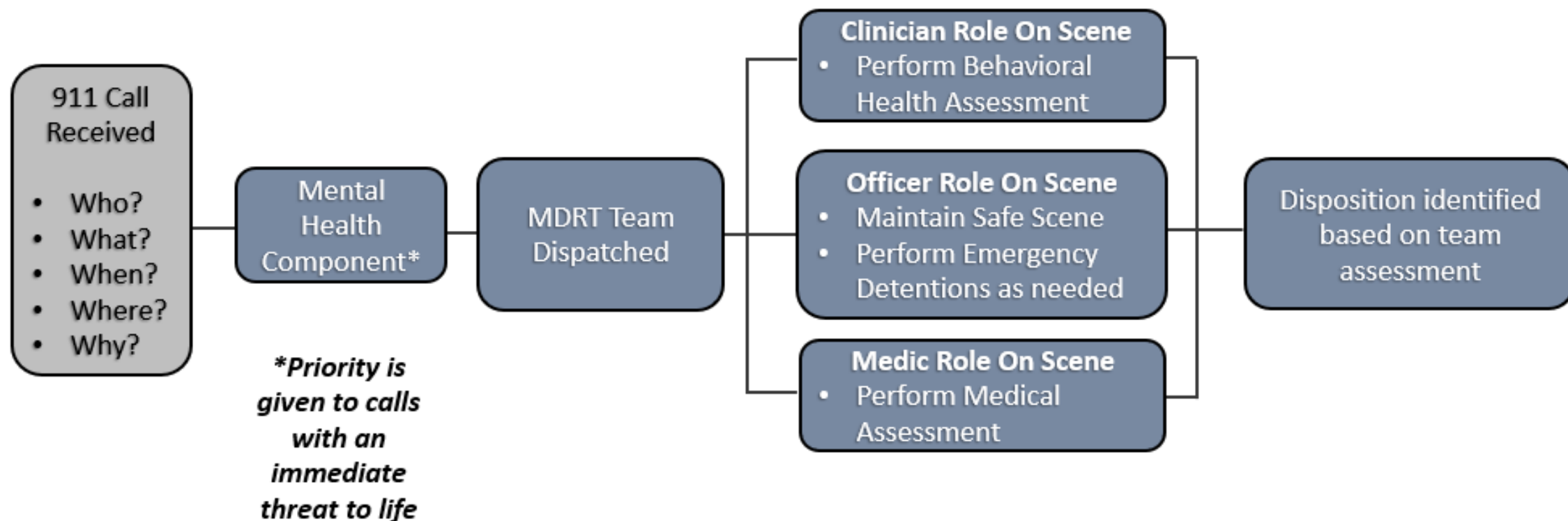


Clinician Role

- De-escalate and provide complete mental health assessment
- Connect to longer term resources as needed/appropriate
- Follow up as needed



Multidisciplinary Team Workflow



Multidisciplinary Team Outcomes

Most Restrictive ← Least Restrictive

On Scene Options



Follow Up Options



Resource Options



STCC Multidisciplinary Teams									
Team Name	Year Est. with STCC	Agencies Involved	Threat/ 911 High Utilizer	High Volume Emergency Detention	Follow up	Response	Peer Support	Medical Support	LE Support
PICC <i>Program for Intensive Care Coordination</i>	2019	SAPD SAFD CHCS		X	X		X	X	X
MAPS <i>Multi-Agency Partnership for Stabilization</i>	2019	SAPD CHCS	X		X	X			X
SMART <i>Specialized Multidisciplinary Alternate Response Team</i>	2020	BCSO Acadian, D2, CHCS			X	X	X	X	X
SA-CORE <i>San Antonio Community Outreach & Resiliency Effort</i>	2022	SAPD SAFD CHCS			X	X		X	X

SA CORE

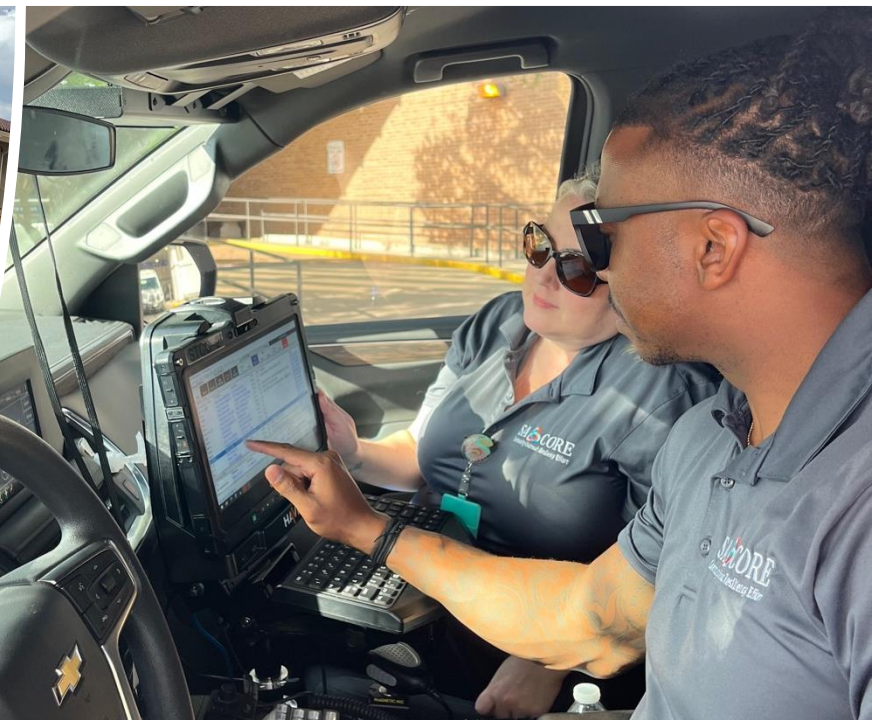
Community Outreach & Resiliency Effort



METRO HEALTH



the center



S.M.A.R.T.

Specialized Multidisciplinary Alternate Response Team



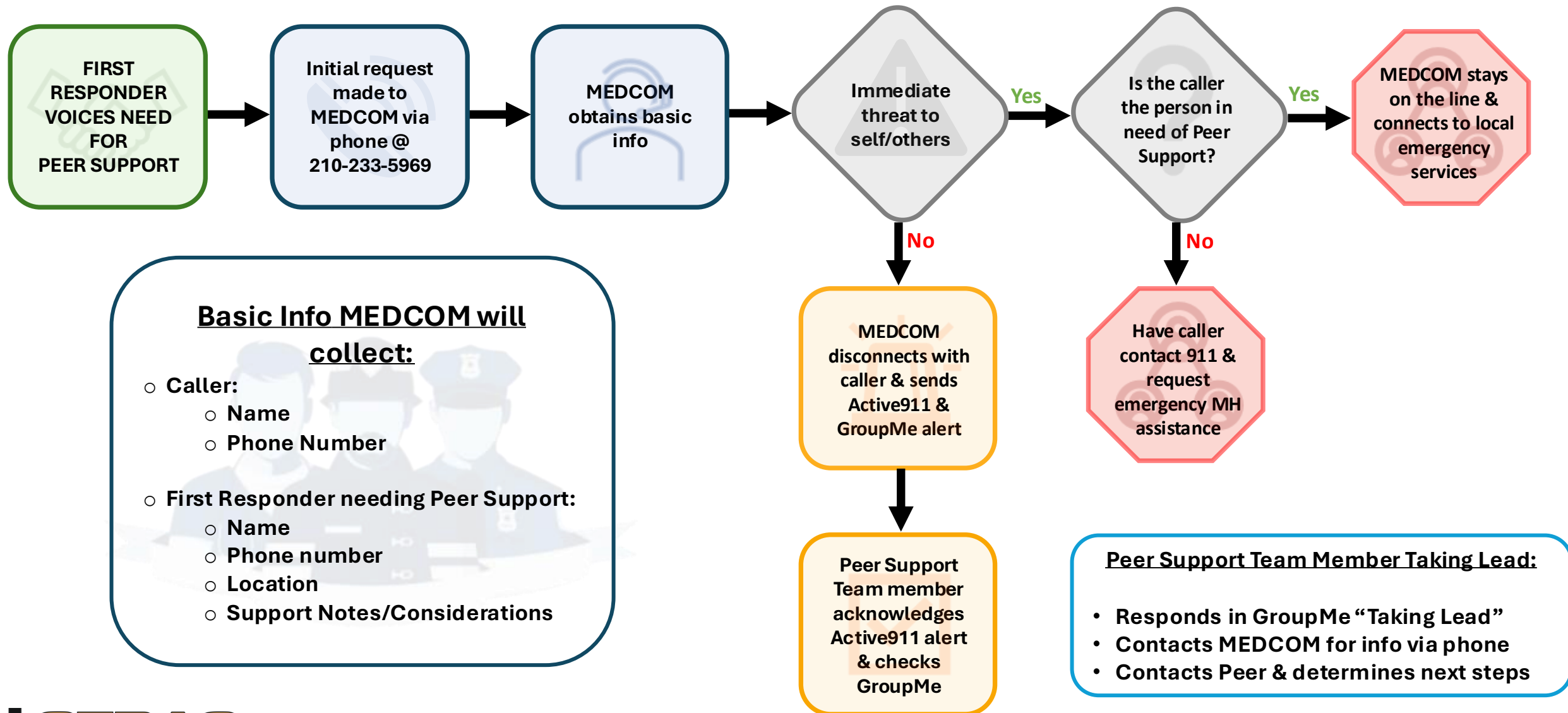
July 4, 2025



KVUE

Source: KVUE

Regional First Responder Peer Support Network



TX EMTF

Texas Emergency Medical Task Force 2010

Program was created and funded by the Hospital Preparedness Program in 2010 and is the Acute Medical arm of the ESP 8 (Public Health and Medical) response team.



- State and Regional Health & Medical disaster response assets
- Goal of EMTF is to provide coordinated response, offer rapid medical assistance to emergency operation systems during large-scale incidents
- Each region coordinates with Healthcare partners to provide deployable teams assets
- Goals
 - Rapidly deployable
 - Build upon regional capability
 - Integrated command/control elements
 - Self-sufficient for (72hrs)
 - NIMS compliant
 - Modular deployment options



West 1st No Notice 2012

EMTF responded for the first no-notice incident with the Mobile Medical Unit following the explosion of the West Fertilizer Plant in West, TX.



West Texas Ice Storms 2013

Icy roadways in West Texas prompted the activation of State resources to aid in the emergency transfer of trauma patients stranded by weather.



Memorial Day Floods 2015

Historic rainfall caused record flooding in May of 2015. EMTF quickly mobilized to care for persons rescued and evacuated by local fire departments and TX Task



Garland Area Tornado 2015

A tornado in the evening ripped through several communities northeast of the Metroplex on the day after Christmas.



Panhandle Wildfires 2016

Rampant wildfire fanned by strong winds caused the evacuation of portions of Pampa, TX including a nursing facility.



Southeast Texas Floods 2016

EMTF responded to numerous requests for State assistance during the months of flooding this Spring and Summer.



TX EMTF

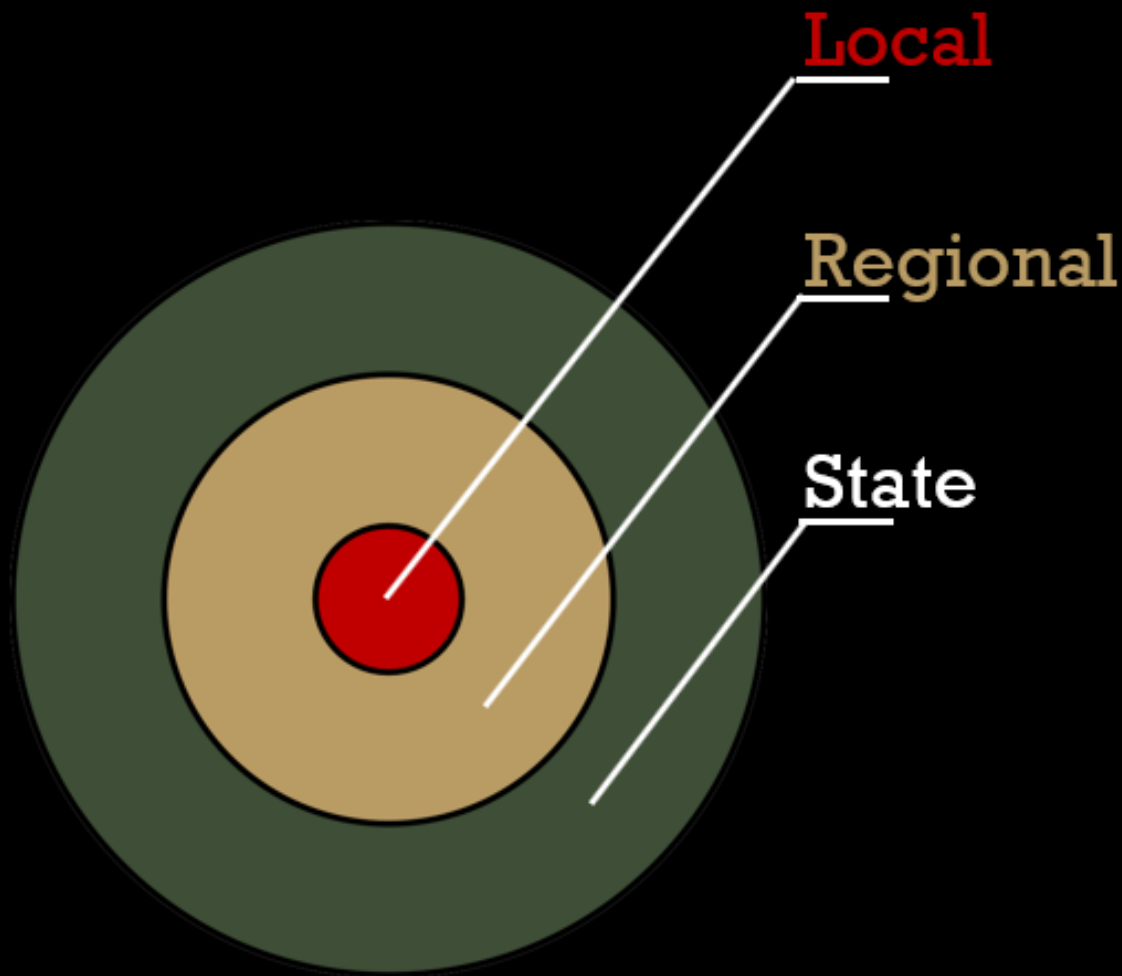
Early Deployments

TX EMTF Deployment

‘All disasters are local’

TX EMTF assets and teams are available to deploy both regionally and on behalf of the state through the TX EMTF MOA

Missions begin with the *authority having jurisdiction* requesting TX EMTF assets through the standard Emergency Management resource requesting process



AMBUS

Primary use – MCI support & medical evacuation of large numbers of patients

- Can transport up to 20 litter patients at a time (dependent upon criticality of patients)



Crewed by 6

One designated as Crew Chief

One designated as Load Master

One designated as Driver / Operator

Four Paramedics (SMAs)



Texas Emergency Medical Task Force AMBUS Program

EMTF 1

MPV 1-01
University Medical Center EMS
MPV 1-02
Amarillo Fire

EMTF 9

MPV 9-01
Elite Medical Transport

EMTF 8

MPV 8-01 Schertz EMS
MPV 8-02 San Antonio Fire

EMTF 11

MPV 11-01
Weslaco Fire
MPV 11-02
Corpus Christi Fire



EMTF 2

MPV 2-01 Frisco Fire
MPV 2-02 Flower Mound Fire
MPV 2-03 Cedar Hill Fire
MPV 2-04 MedStar
MPV 2-05 Abilene Fire

EMTF 4

MPV 4-01 Hopkins County EMS

EMTF 7

MPV 7-01 Austin Travis County EMS

EMTF 6

MPV 6-01 Atascocita Fire
MPV 6-02 Houston Fire
MPV 6-03 Fort Bend County EMS
MPV 6-04 Acadian Ambulance Service



AST

Ambulance Strike
Team:

5 Ambulances

1/2 Ambulance
Strike Team
Leaders

Ambulance Strike
Group:

5 Ambulance Strike
Teams



ASMT

Ambulance Staging Management Team Training

Staffed depending on staging area size and duration of deployment

Provide accountability, logistics, and coordination for Ambulances, AMBUSs, and other equipment supporting disaster responses at designated staging sites



MIST

Medical Incident Support Team Training

MIST members are acute healthcare leadership personnel who are trained to provide support to local jurisdictions, healthcare facilities and local healthcare infrastructure during a disaster

MIST members are selected and trained partner leadership with broad based experience in the health and medical disaster response arena



MMU

- ◆ MMU – deployable, self-contained medical unit designed to provide temporary medical facilities that scales to a mission
- ◆ Comprised of:
 - ◆ command,
 - ◆ clinical, and
 - ◆ logistics teams



**Ambulance Staging
Managers**

Task Force Leadership

**Medical Incident Support
Teams**

Ambulance Strike Teams



Ambulance Buses



Mobile Medical Unit



Nurse Strike Teams



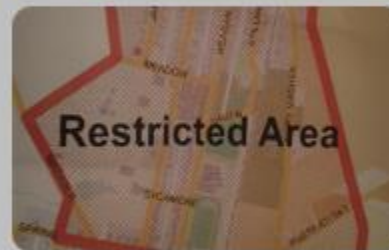
Air Medical Strike Teams



**Infectious Disease
Response Unit**



**Mass Fatality Operations
Response Team**



Tactical Medic Support

Wildland Fire Support



Levels of MCI

LEVEL ONE NOTIFICATION

- 5-8 Patients on Scene (or number of patients exceeds local capabilities).
- Local Mutual Aid response only, no regional assets deployed unless requested (cafeteria plan).
- Notification to effected areas as needed (MEDCOM notification to receiving hospitals).



LEVEL TWO NOTIFICATION

- 9-40 Patients on Scene or at Multiple Locations.
- Upon declaration of Level II, auto dispatch one RMA package.
- Additional packages at request.



LEVEL THREE NOTIFICATION

- >40 Patients on Scene or at Multiple Locations.
- Upon declaration of Level III, auto dispatch one RMA package.
- Additional packages at request.

**Number of packages
requested determined by
Authority Having Jurisdiction
(AHJ)*

1* package

2* packages

3* packages

Response Packages

STANDARD PACKAGE RMA

Package put together for “most” responses; agency can request specific assets (cafeteria plan).

- ☐ 1 – Ambulance Strike Team (AST) and 1 Ambulance Strike Team Leader (ASTL)
- ☐ 1 – AMBUS
- ☐ 4 – Medical Incident Support Team (MIST) Personnel
- ☐ Optional: 1 MCI Whole Blood Pushpack on standby
- ☐ Optional: 1 Air Medical Strike Team (AMST) and 1 Air MIST



TX Emergency Medical Task Force

July 4th, 2025

6:21 AM TXEMTF was Requested to Activate 3 Severe Wx Packages:

We deployed 3-TFL, 6-MISTs, 25-Ambulances with Leaders, & 3 AMBUS'.
2 additional SWX Packages were placed on Standby then later Activated.

EMTF State Coordination Officers were immediately enroute to the State Operations Center in Austin.

By 08:30: Texas EMTF was Full Integrated into the State Operations Center in Austin.

By the End of Day 1 (July the 4th): 169 EMTF personnel and 78 assets had been deployed, with 63 personnel 33 assets on standby.

On Day 2: A 6 member TMORT Team Arrived On-Scene to support local JPs & Authority having jurisdiction and All teams were fully Operational.

The Days to follow: 2 Mobile Medical Units, Peer Support, CISD Teams & UTV-Medics were Activated



This was different....

- Unprecedented level of destruction
- Size and length of the response
- Volume and demographics of decedents



PEER SUPPORT DEPLOYED TO KERRVILLE

A Timeline of Connection, Collaboration, and Response

JULY 4



FLOODS AND INITIAL RESPONSE



Catastrophic flooding impacts Kerrville. First responders and agencies initiate immediate response and rescue efforts.

JULY 5



PHONE CALL REGARDING INTERNAL STRAC LOGISTICS TEAMS WORKING IN MORGUE



Received a phone call regarding internal STRAC logistics teams deployed and working in the morgue in Kerrville.

JULY 5



DIRECT CONNECTION WITH LOGISTICS TEAM AND PSYCHIATRIST WHO SERVES AS THE STCC CRISIS RESPONSE MEDICAL DIRECTOR



Established direct connection with the logistics team on the ground and the psychiatrist serving as the STCC crisis response medical director.

JULY 8



HALLWAY CONVERSATION ABOUT "HOW BAD THIS INCIDENT WAS"



A hallway conversation sparked a deeper understanding of the magnitude and impact of this incident.

JULY 9



FIRST EVER EMT-F PEER SUPPORT TEAM ARRIVED IN KERRVILLE



The first-ever EMT-F peer support team deployed to Kerrville to begin on-the-ground supporting responders.



RAPID RESPONSE PEER SUPPORT

IN DISASTER ENVIRONMENTS



WHY IT MATTERS

Responders facing
high-stress,
non-traditional
missions.



THE REALITY

Fast-moving
incidents.
Difficult conditions.
Mass casualties.



OUR APPROACH

Deploy peer
support early
and alongside
responders.



HOW IT WORKS

Mobile.
Informal.
Responder-to-
responder support.



OUTCOME

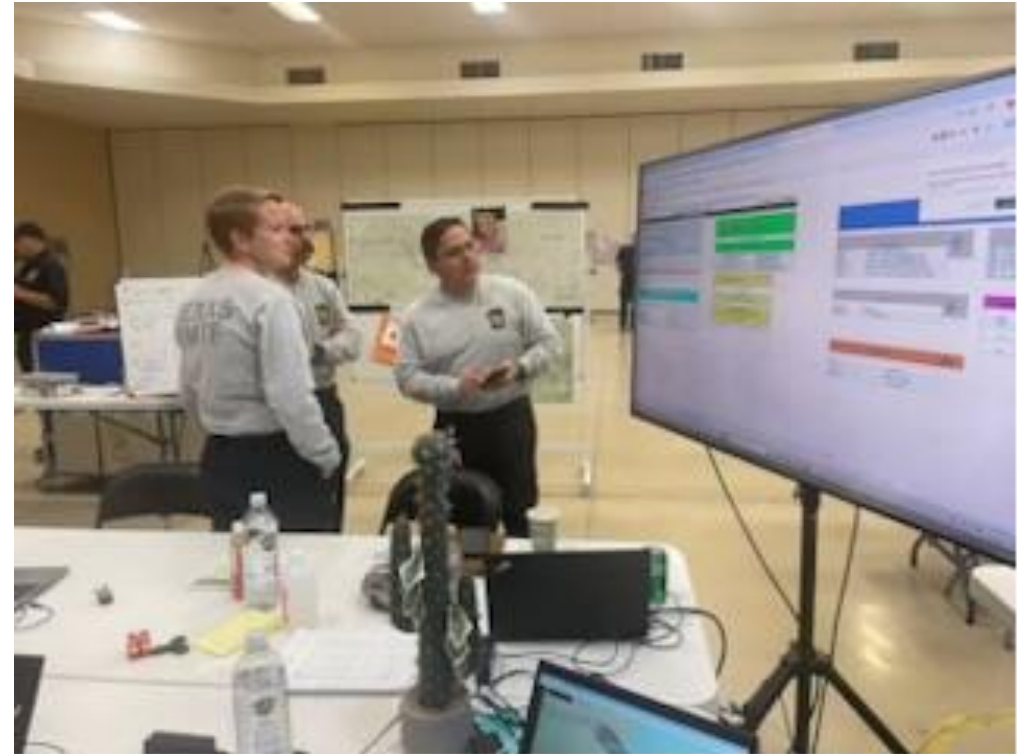
Timely support
with minimal
disruption to
operations.





From Fragmentation to Focus

- **Phase 2 Initial Response**
 - 5-person Peer Support EMTF Package
- **Discovery of Fragmentation**
 - Multiple assets with overlapping objectives
- **The Focus**
 - TDEM and EMTF teams collaborated
 - Integrated into the IMT Command Structure



Peer Support Access During the Kerrville Response

- **Operational Barriers to Peer Support**

- The use of **green safety vests** created unintended perceptions among responders.
- In the first responder culture, a green vest is often associated with:
 - Safety officers
 - Compliance personnel
 - OSHA or oversight functions
 - Individuals evaluating operations and accountability
- Many firefighters and responders perceived personnel in green vests as individuals who could remove them from operations or report performance concerns.

- **Impact on Peer Support Engagement**

- Responders were hesitant to approach or speak with personnel wearing green vests.
- Concerns existed that seeking support could be viewed as:
 - An inability to continue operations
 - A sign of diminished readiness
 - A reason to be reassigned or removed from the line
- Fragmentation of support resources and inconsistent identification of peer support personnel further complicated access.



The Mental Health Impact



Source: Scripps News

Texas Health & Human Services (HHSC)



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

What is Texas HHSC?

The State agency responsible for a wide range of health & human services. HHSC oversees behavioral health services thru a network of Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHA's).

HHSC provides **oversight** of LMHAs by:

- Establishing policy and standards
- Allocating state funding
- Providing supervision and accountability
- Ensuring access to quality behavioral health care



Support for Kerr County Residents

Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC)

- Coordinated statewide disaster response efforts to support local communities
- Access to immediate emotional and mental health support
- Connected people to resources, services, and ongoing support



KERR COUNTY DEPLOYMENT ROTATION

WEEK 1	July 13th – July 15th	Camino Real Community Services
WEEK 2	July 20th – July 29th	Integral Care
WEEK 3	July 27th – August 5th	Bluebonnet Trails
WEEK 4	August 3rd – August 12th	The Center for Health Care Services
WEEK 5	August 10th – August 19th	Tropical Texas Behavioral Health





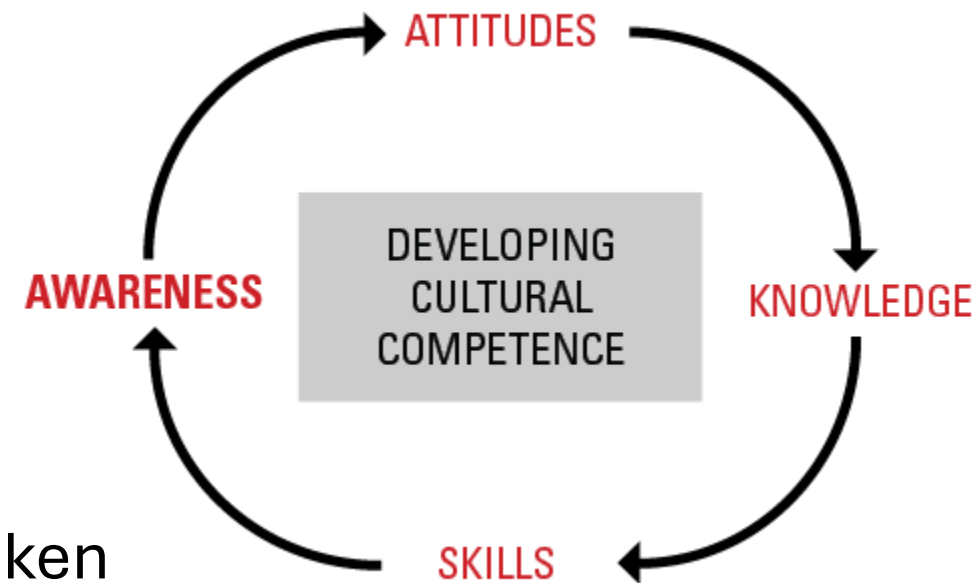
Community-Based Points of Care

Three Partners. One Mission.



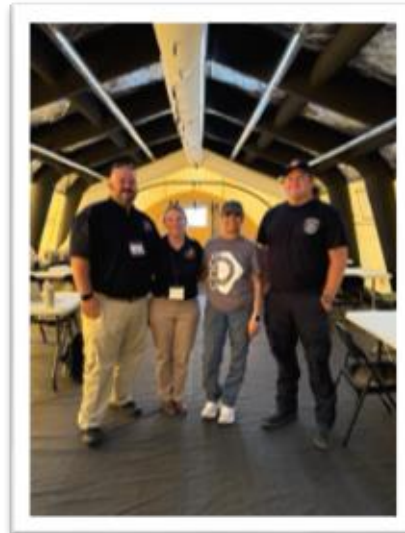
The Impact of Cultural Competence

- Clinicians with first responder cultural competence transformed how support was received
 - Recognizing operational tempo
 - Respecting chain of command and team dynamics
 - Understanding humor, language, and unspoken norms
 - Acknowledging the reality of cumulative trauma without over-pathologizing



Multidisciplinary Peer Support Team

- Building a Multidisciplinary Response
 - Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM)
 - First Responder from Emergency Medical Task Force (EMTF)
 - Clinician support through Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) partnered with HHSC
- Different roles, one mission: support the people carrying the weight of response



PLAY THERAPY FOR FIRST RESPONDERS

Healing Through Play. Restoring Humanity.

In the middle of the mission, we create moments of connection, laughter, and relief.

WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?



Play is a powerful tool that promotes:

- ✓ Stress reduction
- ✓ Emotional regulation
- ✓ Connection and trust
- ✓ Creativity and resilience
- ✓ A return to feeling human



IT'S NOT ABOUT ESCAPING THE MISSION. *It's about sustaining the people on it.*

HOW WE USE PLAY



CREATE INVITING SPACES

Lounge areas with games, comfortable seating, and a judgment-free zone.



USE SIMPLE ACTIVITIES

Games, puzzles, cards, art, and humor open the door to connection.



ENCOURAGE NATURAL CONVERSATION

Play leads to organic check-ins and meaningful dialogue when ready.



SUPPORT TEAM BONDING

Strengthening relationships helps teams look out for each other on and off the scene.



PROMOTE RESET MOMENTS

Even a few minutes of play can shift the nervous system and improve focus, patience, and morale.

WHY IT WORKS



LOWERS DEFENSES

Play helps reduce barriers and creates a safe space without pressure.



BUILDS CONNECTION

Shared activities spark conversation, laughter, and camaraderie.



REGULATES STRESS

Play activates the body's natural ability to relax, reset, and recover.



RESTORES HUMANITY

Moments of fun and normalcy remind us that we are more than the job.

EXAMPLES OF PLAY IN ACTION

- ✓ Cornhole between operations
- ✓ Card games during downtime
- ✓ Coloring sheets on the table
- ✓ Word games and trivia
- ✓ Sharing stories and laughter
- ✓ Music, movement, and fun just because



WE SEE YOU. WE SUPPORT YOU. WE'VE GOT YOUR SIX.

You protect others. We're here to support you.



Meeting First Responders Where They Are

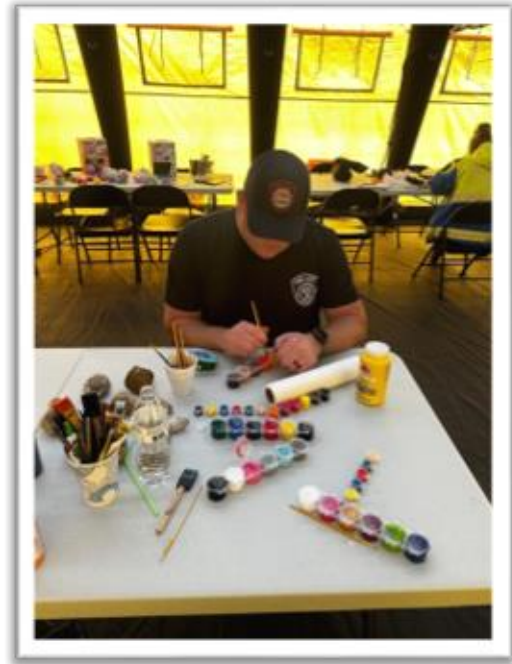
- Focus on approachability and trust-building in the field
- Use of informal, low-barrier engagement strategies
 - Walking alongside the crews on the river
 - Brief check-ins during downtime
 - Creating space without forcing conversation



Peer Support Lounge

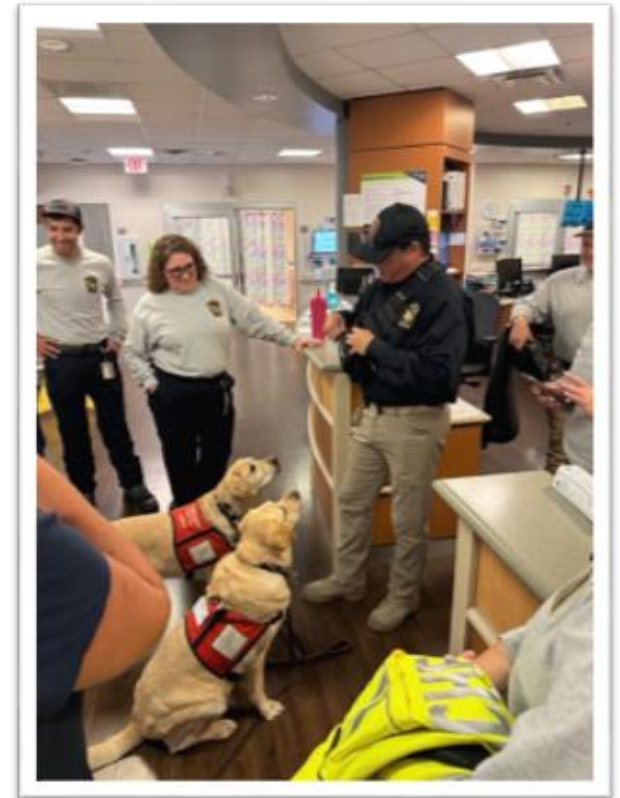
Relax. Reset. Recharge.

- Comfortable , low stimulation environment
- Informal peer connection opportunities
- Hands on activities to support mental reset
- Snacks and beverages available



Peer Support: Field Operations

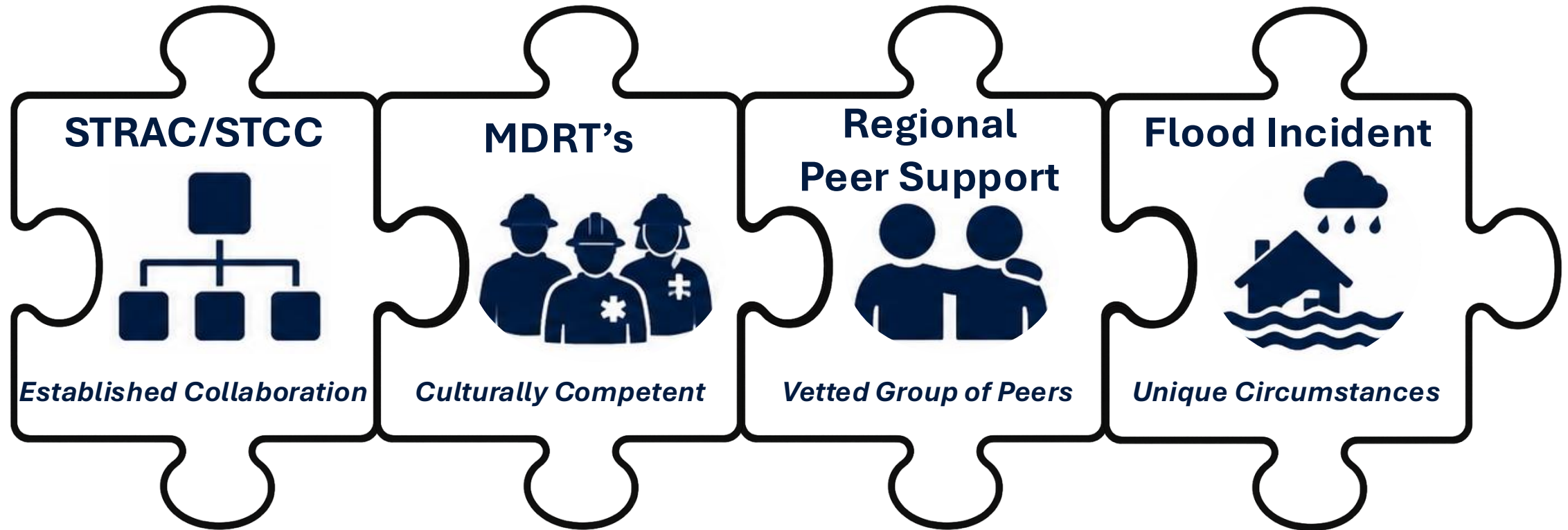
- On site check ins
- Building relationships and trust
- Early identification of stress and needs
- Real time engagement



Thoughts from a First Responder



Putting the Puzzle Together



*All these pieces allowed us to quickly build a **coordinated, compassionate and connected** Multidisciplinary Peer Support Team to fit the needs of First Responders.*



Lessons Learned

- Every disaster will require a different peer support model, important to have all the “tools in the toolbox” to choose from
 - Network of trained First Responder Peers
 - Access to culturally competent clinicians
 - Access to supplies/equipment that can be tailored to fit the current need
 - CISM debriefings
- Informal engagement led to meaningful connections.
Clinical adaptation is key.
- Flexibility is key, needs will change and the team should easily adapt to those new needs



Texas Division of Emergency Management Peer Support Network



TEXAS HOUSE BILL 35



Statewide access to peer-to-peer support for all levels of FD/EMS



Enable connection to clinical resources at no cost to responders (when available)



Standardized training for peers and coordinators, including suicide prevention



Ensure strict confidentiality of participation and user data



Technical assistance for program development and implementation, accessible to both urban and rural jurisdictions



Protect responders from disciplinary action tied to participation



Identification, screening, and retention of licensed mental health professionals

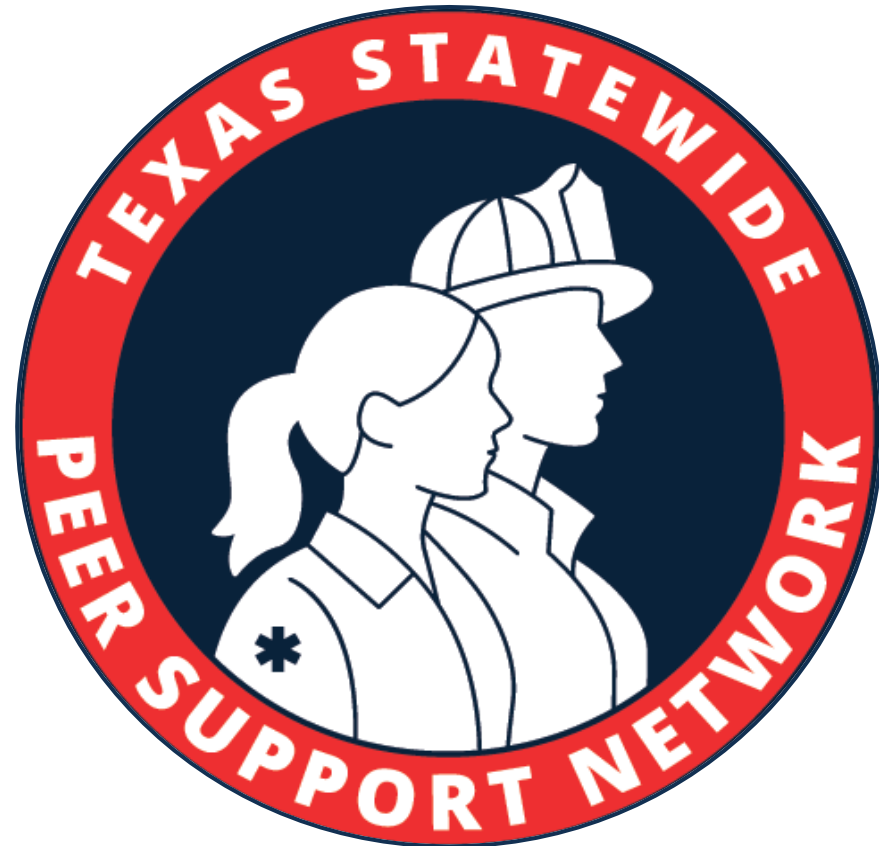


Annual legislative reporting on several data points to show usage of the program and a program evaluation



BUILDING THE NETWORK

- Vetted peer supporters from FD/EMS departments around the State
- Volunteer role, peers control availability
- Access to clinical consult and other resources when needed
- Standardized minimum training



PEER SUPPORT PHONE LINE

How it works today



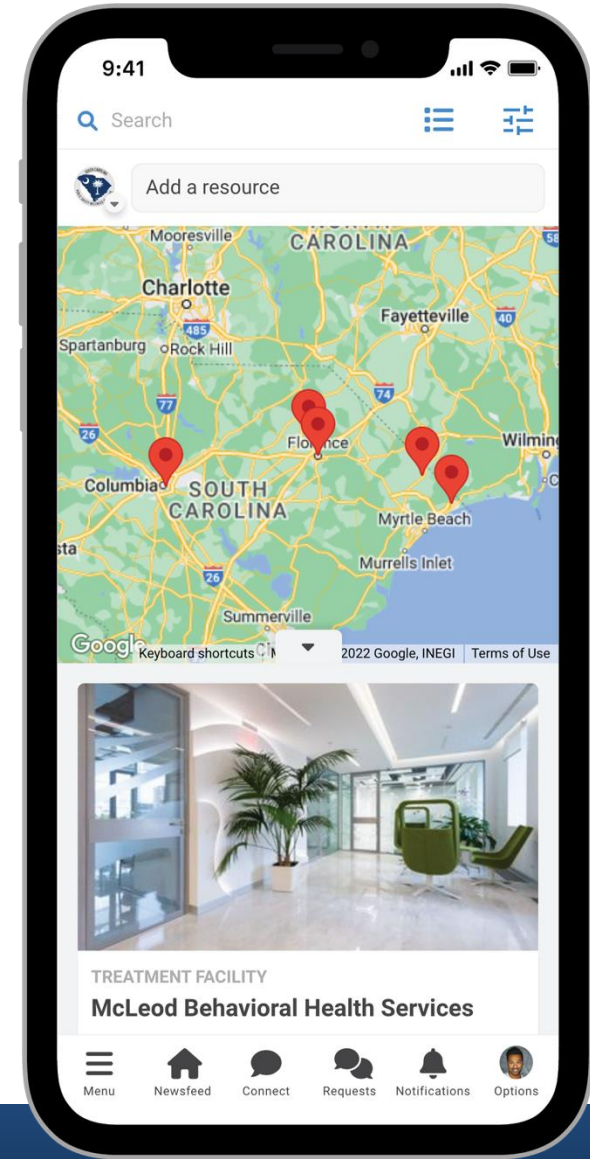
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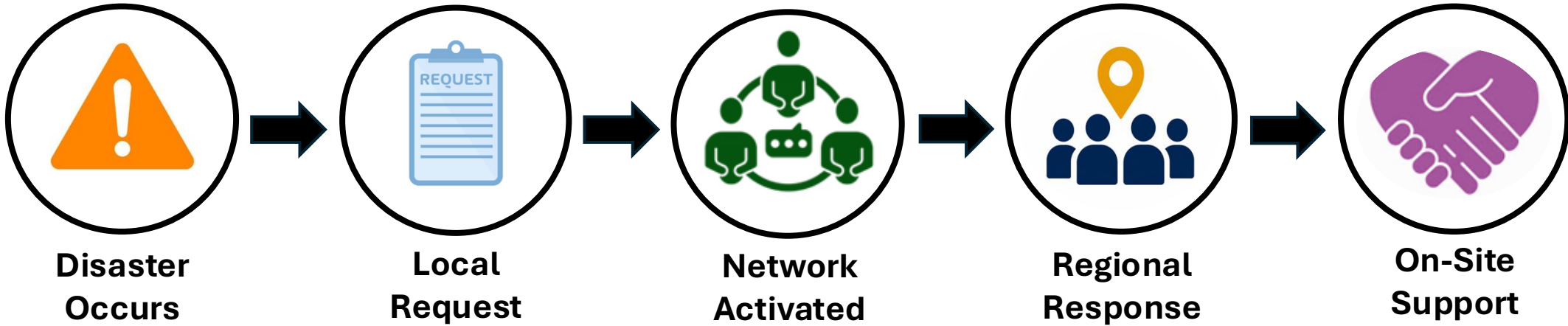
PEER SUPPORT & WELLNESS APP

Coming Soon!

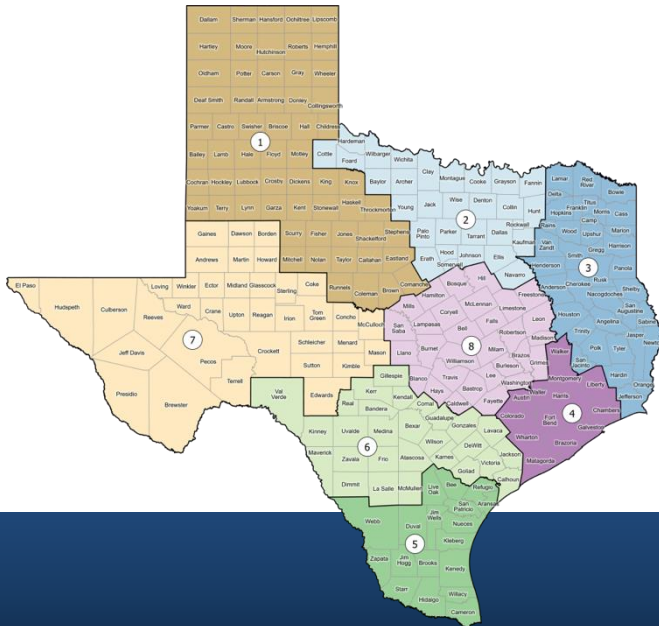
- Free access for all FD/EMS in State, paid or volunteer, active or inactive
- Anonymous access to peer support
- Ability to filter peer supporters by location, gender, qualifications
- Wellness resources for both first responders and family members



DISASTER DEPLOYMENT



**Statewide Network organized by
TDEM Regions**



PROGRAM INFO & PEER SUPPORTER APPLICATION



PROGRAM INFO

Learn more about the Peer Support Program.



PEER SUPPORT

Connect. Support.
Make a difference.



APPLY TODAY

Join the statewide peer support network.



QUESTIONS



Thank You!



peersupport@tdem.texas.gov