

CITY PROFILE *DRAFT*
-CITY OF WINNIPEG-
Cross-Boundary Collaboration Program
Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative

THE CHALLENGE OR OPPORTUNITY

The City of Winnipeg wants to reduce the extent to which police officers are dispatched in response to calls for service that are not criminal in nature.

The Winnipeg Police Board's current strategic plan identifies that approximately one-half to two-thirds of all calls for service to which police officers are dispatched are in response to issues that are not criminal.

Consequently, extensive and expensive policing resources are being used to respond to families in crisis, individuals dealing with mental health, medical, and substance abuse challenges, as well as missing persons and runaways. While dispatch of police officers to these types of calls for service will at times be indicated, there is an opportunity to optimize dispatch such that the responding agency, as well as the responding personnel, are better aligned with the needs of those seeking assistance.

These demands put significant pressure on police service resources. This pressure come at a time when City of Winnipeg financial resources are limited, the crime severity index in Winnipeg is increasing, and follows more than a decade of annual budgetary increases to the police service that exceeded inflationary thresholds to the point the Winnipeg Police Service budget now represents the largest civic operating budget and almost one third of the City of Winnipeg's overall expenditures.

THE DESIRED ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

The primary goal of this cross-boundary initiative is to identify ways to reduce dispatch of police resources to service calls that are unrelated to criminal matters such that the safety and wellbeing of those seeking assistance are not jeopardized, and that the right resources are being dispatched at the right time.

A simple, leading indicator of success would be represented by a decrease in police officers being dispatched to calls for service that are not deemed criminal.

Furthermore, police officers responding to service calls that are not criminal can be stigmatizing for many individuals who are much more in need of health and social services (services that are available from a host of different agencies and organizations) rather than criminal enforcement and intervention (services available exclusively by police). As such, some of the longer term indicators and outcomes of success could include improved community relationships for the police service, improved resource allocation for the police service, improved delivery of health and social services for the health and social service system, and improved health outcomes within the Winnipeg health region.

THE NEED FOR CROSS-BOUNDARY COLLABORATION

Optimizing response and dispatch to calls for service that are not criminal requires broad collaboration within the City of Winnipeg, with other levels of government, as well as with many diverse community health and social service organizations and agencies already well versed in mitigating and responding to issues rooted in various socioeconomic factors.

While it is unrealistic to expect cross-boundary collaboration to eliminate root, socioeconomic and health challenges underlying many of the calls to which police officers are the initial first responders dispatched, a greater degree of shared understanding of the issue's complexity can significantly contribute toward a cross jurisdictional effort that could not only optimize the allocation of police resources in the short/medium term, but also improve health outcomes for the city's population over the longer term.