

Media Release

For Immediate Release

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Announcing London's New Community Outreach and Support Team (COAST)

London Ontario- A newly established outreach and support service is being piloted in London for individuals experiencing serious and/or acute mental health and addictions issues.

Together, Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Elgin-Middlesex, St. Joseph's Health Care London (St. Joseph's), Middlesex-London Paramedic Service (MLPS), and London Police Service (LPS), announced a joint initiative called the [Community Outreach and Support Team \(COAST\)](#); a newly established outreach and support service for individuals experiencing serious/acute mental health and addictions issues.

In the course of caring for some of the most vulnerable citizens in our community who suffer from serious, persistent mental illness and addictions, there are times when the police are mandated by law to assist individuals in accessing mental health care. The COAST model facilitates specialized mental health care support for LPS, assisting them to carry out mandated activities while improving the experience of those in need.

The main goals of COAST are to reduce the need for police-led responses to situations in which an individual is experiencing a mental health/addictions related concern, reducing interactions with front line LPS officers in these scenarios and hence, improving outcomes for these individuals by ensuring they receive the appropriate care.

The team engages and interacts with individuals 16 years of age or older, living in the community with serious mental health issues and who are at risk of crisis due to addictions, poverty and/or homelessness and aims to:

- Support individuals living with mental illness through proactive intervention and brief post-interaction follow up
- Assist individuals in navigating and accessing local mental health care services and programs
- Prevent mental health related calls for service to LPS
- Divert individuals from unnecessary hospital emergency department visits
- Divert individuals from unnecessary involvement in the criminal justice system
- Decrease stigma of individuals living with mental health and/or addictions issues
- Build and maintain effective partnerships between the police service and health care providers.

Each COAST member brings valuable yet specialized training to the table, providing the opportunity to leverage skills and knowledge across the team and to work collaboratively, supporting each individual's unique needs.

Teams work varying shifts, seven days a week. During a shift, each COAST team consists of two members: one COAST constable from LPS and one COAST health care provider from either MLPS, CMHA Elgin-Middlesex, or St. Joseph's. Health care members consist of nurses from St. Joseph's Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams, social workers from CMHA and paramedics from MLPS. Police COAST members are not in uniform and the team does not travel in a marked cruiser.

This one-year pilot project is anticipated to run until March 31, 2022. Over the course of the pilot year, the model of service delivery will be expanded and evaluated with the goal to secure sustainable funding.

Spokesperson quotes:

"By partnering with London Police Services, St. Joseph's Health Care London, and Middlesex-London Paramedic Services, our trained mental health crisis workers are able to better support individuals who struggle with serious mental health or addiction issues by proactively connecting them with appropriate resources and support. Over the past year, we have seen how the pandemic and the associated stress, anxiety and social isolation have negatively affected the mental health of many individuals in our community, especially among vulnerable populations. As we move forward, these types of collaborations and partnerships are an important part of the ongoing advancement of mental health care."
-Lori Hassall, Director of Crisis Services, CMHA Elgin-Middlesex

"Part of St. Joseph's Health Care London's mission is to advocate for those who are vulnerable and without a voice, and to actively pursue and build partnerships to create a better health care system. The COAST initiative provides a missing link within our community, as well as for the outpatient and outreach teams of St. Joseph's mental health care programs, because it adds a layer of proactive, health care-led intervention. Essentially, we are building on the existing strengths of our community services, while addressing gaps in the system by improving collaboration between health care services and police."
-Deb Gibson, Mental Health Care Director, St. Joseph's Health Care London

"Historically barriers to mental health care have led individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis to be dependent on the 911 system as their primary access point of care. Community paramedics participating with the COAST program are able to use their years of experience during crises, to provide proactive support to individuals in the community prior to the need for emergency service engagement. Increasing collaborative community mental health supports like COAST is integral to decreasing inequities for those suffering from a mental health illness."
-Dustin Carter, Superintendent, Middlesex-London Paramedic Service

"We at London Police Service are very pleased to be part of the COAST program. We know that providing a police-led response to individuals experiencing mental health/addictions crisis is not ideal. Our hope is that through proactive intervention alongside our mental health partners, we can improve outcomes for those in need of mental health or addictions support before they enter into a crisis situation. Our role is one of ensuring safety for all involved, and assisting with getting individuals the care they need in an appropriate setting."
-Superintendent Bill Chantler, Uniformed Division, London Police Service

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About Canadian Mental Health Association, Elgin-Middlesex (*Now integrated as CMHA Thames Valley Addiction & Mental Health Services*)

CMHA Elgin-Middlesex provides community-based mental health services, housing supports, outreach and education through many locations across London, St. Thomas, Elgin, Middlesex, Strathroy, Exeter and Goderich. We promote mental wellness through responsive and innovative services and empower individuals on their recovery journey. www.cmhamiddlesex.ca or www.cmhaelgin.ca

About St. Joseph's Health Care London

Renowned for compassionate care, St. Joseph's Health Care London is a leading academic health care centre in Canada dedicated to helping people live to their fullest by minimizing the effects of injury, disease and disability through excellence in care, teaching and research. Through partnership with Lawson Health Research Institute and our collaborative engagement with other health care and academic partners, St. Joseph's has become an international leader in the areas of: chronic disease management; medical imaging; specialized mental health care; rehabilitation and specialized geriatrics; and surgery. St. Joseph's operates through a wide range of hospital, clinic and long-term and community-based settings, including: St. Joseph's Hospital; Parkwood Institute; Mount Hope Centre for Long Term Care; and the Southwest Centre for Forensic Mental Health Care. www.sjhc.london.on.ca

About London Police Service

Formed in 1855, the London Police Service is located in southwestern Ontario, Canada. We proudly serve over 390,000 residents in the City of London. Our [Mission, Vision, and Values](#) guide us in what we do. Over 800 sworn and civilian members work hard each day to ensure the safety and well-being of London's communities. www.londonpolice.ca

About Middlesex-London Paramedic Service

Middlesex-London Paramedic Service is responsible for providing 24-hour emergency and non-emergency pre-hospital medical care and transportation to individuals experiencing injury or illness. Our dedicated teams of highly qualified front-line paramedics work with up-to-date equipment and technology to give the residents and visitors of the Middlesex and London area the best service available. www.mlems.ca