

Mindful Responders

Providing Mental Health Assistance

An assessment of the Ottawa Paramedic Service's Pilot Program:
The Mental Wellbeing Response Team (MWRT)

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THE ISSUE

Traditionally, individuals calling 9-1-1 due to mental health or substance use concerns are transported by paramedics to the emergency department.

This often results in patients facing long wait times in the emergency department when more appropriate mental health resources may be available in the community.



BACKGROUND

The Mental Wellbeing Response Team (MWRT) is a pilot program delivered by the Ottawa Paramedic Service which began in March 2022.

- The MWRT is activated for 9-1-1 calls involving mental health or substance use that are non-violent and non-criminal.
- This team includes paramedics partnered with mental health professionals, such as a social worker.
- A medical and mental health evaluation of the patient is completed.
- The team delivers appropriate care and can arrange a referral for mental health care in the community.

Unlike traditional paramedic visits, the MWRT personnel arrive in an unmarked vehicle wearing casual clothing.

After 1 year of operation, the MWRT team has serviced 398 individuals in the community and are now operating on a full-time basis.

OUR ROLE

Who are we?

- Medical students on the Social Accountability Student Advisory Committee (SASAC) who are collaborating with the Ottawa Paramedic Service.

What are we doing?

- Evaluating the impacts of the MWRT using surveys to gather feedback from patients and service providers.
- The surveys were developed using an evaluation framework established by the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Service provider survey

- Intended for MWRT-trained paramedics and mental health professionals.
- Explores job satisfaction, workload, sustainability, and if providers feel prepared to deliver this new model of care.

Patient survey

- Captures overall experience, satisfaction with the care provided by the MWRT, and whether patients accessed follow-up care in the community.

NEXT STEPS & IMPACTS

- We have recruited four medical students who are contributing Community Service Learning hours, a component of our curriculum that emphasizes community engagement.
- Together, we will administer the surveys and compile the results into a report for the Ottawa Paramedic Service and the MOH.

- If successful, the MWRT has the potential to mitigate inequities commonly faced by those seeking mental health support.
- This initiative may increase capacity for non-MWRT paramedics while reducing backlogs in the emergency department.
- Other regions may follow in the footsteps of the MWRT, expanding the reach of this care model.

