



# Virtual Crisis Care

**How Avel eCare's Telemedicine Program  
Helps Law Enforcement Conserve Resources  
and Treat Those in Crisis**



# Filling the gap to provide virtual co-responder services

Estimates show up to 20 percent of police calls involve a mental health or substance use crisis, a number which appears to be growing over time. With the ongoing opioid epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic contributing to the nation's increasing rates of mental health crises, law enforcement departments are feeling the pressure of managing more and more related calls.

Depression rates have tripled since the start of the pandemic while suicidal ideation is also on the rise. At the same time, access to consistent, affordable, and accessible behavioral health services are only available to a small proportion of Americans, leaving law enforcement to close the gaps.

The need for more mental health intervention training is well documented, but departmental resources are scarce, and officers cannot be expected to act as fully qualified clinicians in addition to performing their other duties. The result is often a high number of involuntary committals which consume an extraordinary amount of time, energy, and money.

Here is where Virtual Crisis Care (VCC) steps in. VCC – a program launched in 2020 thanks to a partnership between the Helmsley Charitable Trust, South Dakota, and Avel eCare – delivers an innovative virtual solution to the behavioral health care crisis, covering the gap for first responders and law enforcement.

**Out of 181 encounters during the pilot predicted to result in an involuntary committal, 19 ended up with a person needing immediate inpatient care. In addition, more than three quarters of calls ended with the person remaining in place, avoiding lengthy, costly, and stressful transfer.**



When encountering a person experiencing a mental health crisis, law enforcement officers with access to VCC can use an iPad to connect with a trained counselor who performs a thorough assessment of the situation and makes an informed recommendation about next steps. This approach has been proven to avoid unnecessary involuntary committals – in roughly eight out of ten encounters – while significantly reducing time and effort for law enforcement staff.

“VCC gives law enforcement more cost-effective options for how they approach this part of the job,” said Brian Erickson, Vice President & General Manager of Behavioral Health and Specialty Clinic Services at Avel eCare. “We are proud to be working with forty counties across the state of South Dakota to expand access to behavioral healthcare to those in crisis. Telemedicine has become such an important technology to bridge the digital divide and connect individuals with high-qualified healthcare providers on demand, and it’s time we extend this value to law enforcement agencies who play a critical role in addressing behavioral health crises in our local communities.”



*Deputy from Faulk County Sheriff's Office demonstrating the virtual crisis tablet*

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Now the pilot has concluded, Avel eCare is set to expand its standalone VCC program to even more counties and states in 2022. Whether operating in rural or urban areas, law enforcement agencies and first responders have the opportunity to use telemedicine technology as a cost-effective, high-impact method to diffuse tense situations, conserve their resources, and improve outcomes for individuals in crisis.

Those interested in learning more about the program are encouraged to contact Avel eCare by emailing [contact@avelecare.com](mailto:contact@avelecare.com) or by calling (605) 606-0100.



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