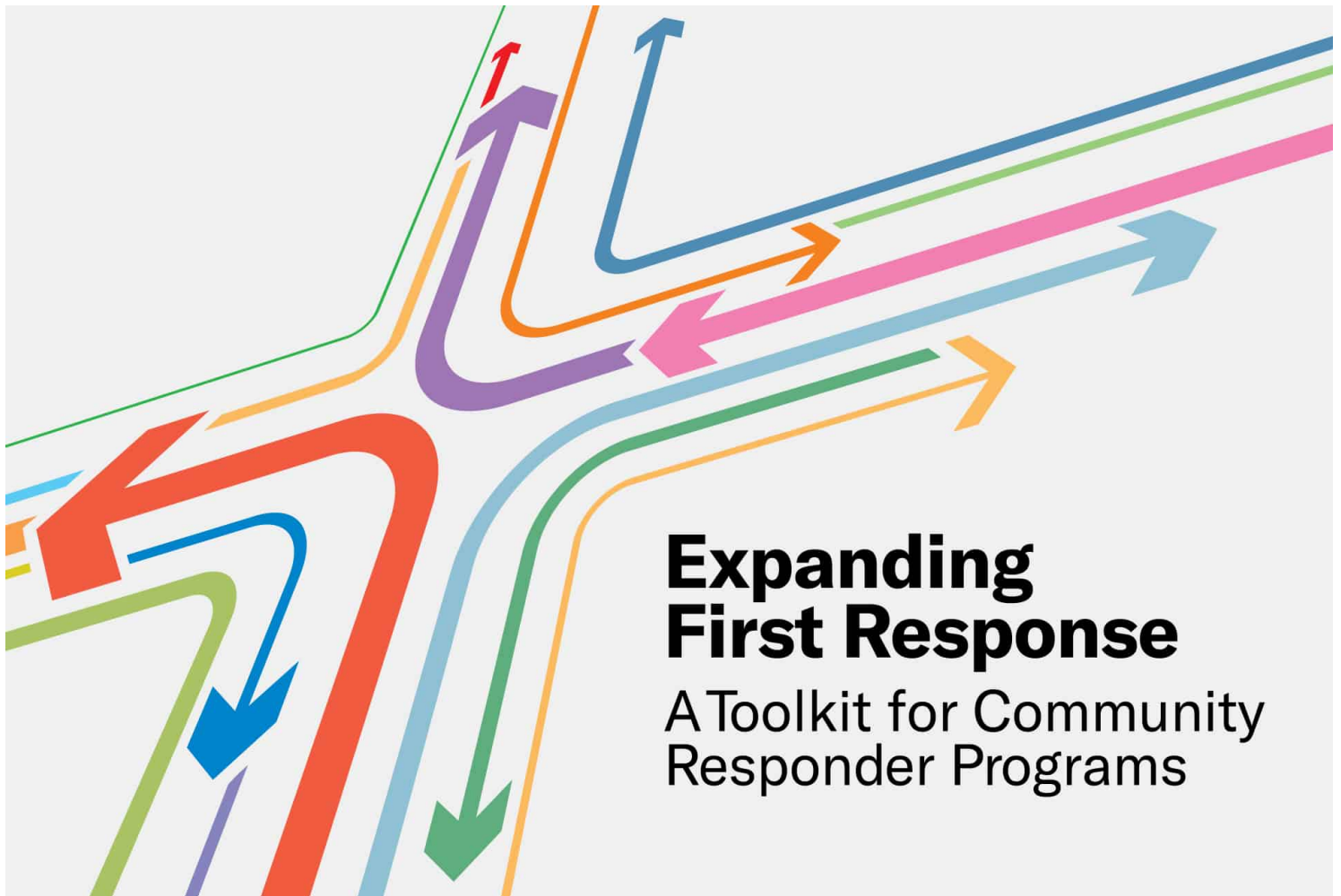




Justice Center
THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS



Menu

The Issue

For decades, Americans have called 911 when they are experiencing an emergency or are in need of assistance. While this can be an effective and convenient way to deploy first responders—whether from police, fire, or emergency medical services (EMS)—many community advocates have argued that it too often results in police officers being dispatched to resolve situations better handled by health and social service professionals. Years of nationwide disinvestment in community health care and social services contribute to this problem. Many communities, particularly ones with large

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) populations, lack properly funded organizations and crisis systems that can provide the care and services needed to reduce jurisdictions' overreliance on police to handle behavioral health (i.e., mental health, substance use, and overdose response) crises and social disturbances.



“I truly see this as part of the future, as part of helping people, meeting them where they are and connecting them to the right service—often without having to have any intersect with the criminal justice system or law enforcement.”

– Chief Paul Pazen, Denver Police Department

WATCH THE VIDEO

The Response

Jurisdictions across the country are now reimagining their approach to public safety by investing in community responder programs that position health professionals and community members trained in crisis response as first responders. Once advocated mostly by grassroots activists, health professionals, and community members, these programs have emerged as an effective way to improve outcomes for people in need and reduce reliance on law enforcement. Several communities are leading the way, implementing an array of community responder models tailored to local needs. By

working together, advocacy and grassroots organizations, government agencies, nonprofit service providers, and neighborhood collectives are showing that investments in these programs can help support people in the community and conserve public resources.

06:13

The Toolkit

This toolkit serves as a central hub for local communities and states looking to establish or strengthen community responder programs. Drawing on the experience of emerging models across the country, the toolkit presents key issues that are crucial to the success of any program. It will be updated regularly with program highlights and additional resources for the field. Each section includes:

- **A snapshot** of the issue,
- **Important considerations** for successful implementation, and
- **Essential resources**, which may include practical strategies, field-based examples, instructive videos, and more.

Used together, these resources can help jurisdictions reimagine public safety and focus on expanding first response efforts for improving health outcomes, strengthening

connections to services, and reducing unnecessary police involvement.



“For us it was really important to hear what the community was saying, to put faces, names, and lived experience behind the numbers. That created an outcry from the community from which people were overwhelmingly saying there should be something different.”

– Reverend Dr. Charles Franklin Boyer, Salvation and Social Justice

WATCH THE VIDEO

Explore the Issues



**Overview of Community
Responder Programs**



**Community Engagement
and Collaboration**



Needs Assessment



Call Triage

Program Staffing



**Use of Data to Inform
Decision Making**



Safety and Wellness



Financial Sustainability



Legislative Strategies

Program Highlights

In this section, explore how existing community responder programs are taking action in each of these issue areas. We encourage people to check back regularly for weekly updates that spotlight additional jurisdictions.



Albuquerque, NM



Atlanta, GA



Eugene, OR



San Francisco, CA

This toolkit is supported by Vital Strategies. Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. Vital Strategies is helping a number of high-burden states in the U.S. strengthen and scale up evidence-based, data-driven interventions to reduce risks of overdose and save lives.

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