

# New TelePsych program offers mental health treatment by phone in Charleston County

by Caroline Balchunas  
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CHARLESTON, S.C. (WCIV) — It's the first of its kind in the country and it's right here in Charleston County. A new program called TelePsych is making mental illness treatment and help much more accessible. When EMS responds to a 911 call, they can call the county's mobile crisis unit if they suspect a [mental health](#) issue.

Before the program, the only option was taking the individual to the emergency room. Instead of going to the emergency room, they are now connected directly with a counselor through video chat, getting them the actual help they need.

"When the supervisor gets there, the ambulance can get back into service, which is really important for the citizens of our county because then we have more ambulances on the street," said Deborah Blalock, Executive Director of the Charleston Mental Health Center.

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Blalock said since the [program](#) started in May, 54-percent of EMS calls have been diverted from the emergency room.

"Folks with behavioral health issues can sit and wait you know eight hours, ten hours until somebody can give them some attention because they have other life-threatening illnesses they have to take care of," said Blalock.

[EMS](#) Director David Abrams said more than half of 911 calls are for suicidality.

"Mental illness is real, it requires real experts, real qualified medical professionals and requires just as much care as any other medical issue that goes on," Abrams said.

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The program is made possible through partnerships with several agencies and organizations including Charleston County DAODAS, Charleston Dorchester [Mental Health](#), Roper St. Francis, Medical University of South Carolina, Trident Medical Center, East Cooper Medical Center, all law enforcement and public safety agencies in the Tri-County area.

"I believe people around the nation are watching what happens here to see how we can best serve from a national standpoint this growing epidemic of mental illness," said Abrams.

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