

When Mental-Health Experts, Not Police, Are the First Responders

The [Wall Street Journal](#) featured CAHOOTS as a model for reducing risk of violence in a November 24, 2018 article by Zusha Elinson. It is included below and [as a PDF](#) with permission from the publisher.

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U.S.

When Mental-Health Experts, Not Police, Are the First Responders

Program in Eugene, Ore., is viewed as a model for reducing risk of violence

*By Zusha Elinson / Photographs by Thomas Patterson
for The Wall Street Journal*

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EUGENE, Ore.—They are the kind of calls that roll into police departments with growing regularity: a man in mental crisis; a woman hanging out near a dumpster at an upscale apartment complex; a homeless woman in distress.

In most American cities, it is police officers who respond to such calls, an approach law-enforcement experts say increases the risk of a violent encounter because they aren't always adequately trained to deal with the mentally ill. At least one in every four people killed by police has a serious mental illness, according to the Treatment Advocacy Center, a nonprofit based in Arlington, Va.

But in Eugene, Oregon's third-largest city, when police receive such calls, they aren't usually the ones who respond. Here, the first responders are typically pairs of hoodie-wearing crisis workers and medics driving white vans stocked with medical supplies, blankets and water.



Ms. Barnhill Hubbard and Mr. Hawks respond to a call Nov. 15 at the University of Oregon in Eugene, as part of a program called Cahoots, which stands for Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Street.

They work for a nonprofit program called Cahoots—which stands for Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Street—and they spent a recent November night calming tense situations, offering medical aid, and pointing people