

WHAT IS ALBANY LEAD?



In April 2016, the City of Albany implemented a groundbreaking, innovative public safety and public health intervention that aimed to reorient the City's approach to substance use, mental health, and poverty-driven contact with law enforcement. This initiative, called Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD®) is built on an approach that understands that these issues are complex and difficult to easily improve, recognizes that behavior change is often a messy and lengthy process, and acknowledges that individual and systemic barriers often require a true "meeting of a person where they're at." This underlying philosophy, called "harm reduction" leads to service delivery that is non-judgmental, non-coercive, and person-centered.

How does it work?

In LEAD, individuals who would typically be arrested and jailed for low-level offenses often driven by psychosocial challenges are instead diverted to harm reduction-based case management and outreach services. One key feature of the project is the continuous communication loop that occurs post-diversion between case management staff, service providers, LEAD stakeholders, and the Albany Police Department. This allows all parties in this communication loop to understand the individual needs of the participant and the importance of meeting the participant where they are at in a non-judgmental, non-coercive manner. Unlike many other models, services delivered to LEAD participants are extremely active and focused on engagement.

What Does Albany LEAD Seek to Accomplish?

LEAD aligns its goals with the following principles:

- **Reorient** government's response to safety, disorder, and health-related problems.
- **Improve** public safety and public health through research based, health oriented and harm reduction intervention
- **Reduce** the number of people entering the criminal justice system for low level offenses related to drug use, mental health, sex work, and extreme poverty
- **Address** racial disparities in the front end of the criminal justice system
- **Sustain** funding for public health responses to behavioral health issues by capturing and reinvesting justice system savings
- **Strengthen** the relationship between law enforcement and the community

Who is Involved with Albany LEAD?

The key stakeholders are: The Albany Office of the Mayor, Albany Police Department, Albany County Executive (which includes multiple agencies like Department of Mental Health and the Public Defenders), Albany County District Attorney, Albany County Sheriff, Central District Management Association (business improvement district), Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services, the Center for Law and Justice, and the Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice. Multiple service provider agencies and other entities play key roles in ensuring quality of services for LEAD participants.

How is the Community Involved in Albany LEAD?

Albany LEAD was developed as the result of community demands to develop new approaches to achieve public safety and health. In 2016, a Community Leadership Team (CLT) was formed as a vehicle for community members who were not otherwise connected to the LEAD process to provide input, ask questions, and help hold the program accountable to community demands for reform. The CLT provides the community with an additional avenue for input into the program. In Albany, the CLT is coordinated through the Center for Law and Justice. The group has also mounted an educational campaign which engages area businesses about LEAD.