



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are thankful to the entire Cambridge community. We wish to extend special appreciation to all of the current and former staff, consultants, and interns of the Community Safety Department (CSD). Additionally, our gratitude extends to the many community members, city employees, and local organizations that contribute to the ongoing success of the department.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

As the Community Safety Department (CSD) enters its second year of operations, we are proud to share our newest annual Impact Report. This report highlights the continued evolution of the department and our dedicated Community Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) team. The work represented in these pages is the product of the bravery and vulnerability of residents who contact us in their time of distress, crisis, and concern. Lives have been transformed, and outcomes dramatically improved.

CSD seeks to reimagine the landscape of public safety. When CARE launched 9-1-1 response last year, we dispatched to individuals in crisis three days a week. Now, we provide five days of alternative response, offering 53 hours each week. In 2025, that translated to more than 2,500 available hours to support residents with mental and behavioral health concerns and well-being. The vibrant use of the CARE team across neighborhoods and demographics shows that the CARE program truly is for everyone. We are proud to be a national leader in offering crisis resolution while centering mental health and community empowerment.

The Cambridge community is vital. All of you have played a role in creating the Cambridge we all wish to see. We've connected with 1,313

residents over the past year—at community events, on streets, and in homes—and these relationships inform our work. We participated in city-wide programs, and partnered with City departments, community organizations, and non-profits. I am thrilled to share the work we have done this year to help all Cambridge residents to feel empowered to advocate for themselves.

I recognize systemic change takes time. Building and executing a new department takes humility and bravery. These traits are crucial to imagining futures where what was once considered an alternative response is just viewed as an appropriate response. This Impact Report is a reminder that each season comes with its own remarkable impact. The seeds planted in 2020 by the Cambridge community itself have allowed the entire City to reap the benefits of a fruitful program in 2025 and in the years to come.

-Marie Mathieu

Marie Mathieu
Director
City of Cambridge Community Safety Department



MISSION, VALUES, AND GOALS

OUR PERSPECTIVE

The Community Safety Department's decisions and actions are guided by its mission, values, and goals.

MISSION

The Cambridge Community Safety Department's mission is to provide additional services to enhance the community's health and well-being, valuing compassion in its prevention and intervention efforts.

VALUES

We grow through curiosity and humility.

We continuously learn and adapt to meet the needs of our community, guided by a growth mindset and shared humanity.

We focus on care and healing.

We treat everyone with kindness, empathy, and respect.

We center connection and collaboration.

We build joyful, authentic partnerships and draw from community wisdom.

We reject systems of harm.

We work to dismantle oppression and create equitable, anti-racist, and inclusive approaches to safety.

We honor dignity and lived experience.

We acknowledge the harms of the criminal legal system and affirm the humanity of all people.

GOALS

1. Reduce overreliance on traditional law enforcement and emergency medical responders by instead dispatching professionals with the tools necessary to resolve a crisis without unnecessary criminal justice involvement.
2. Increase connection to voluntary short-term and long-term community resources for those calling 9-1-1 or receiving other crisis assistance to improve outcomes for residents facing mental health issues, substance use issues, and homelessness.

CARE IS FOR EVERYONE

The Community Safety Department (CSD) originated from requests within the Cambridge community for alternative crisis options. Now in its second year of public operations, the Community Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) team dispatches across the city to respond to 9-1-1 calls while centering compassionate mental and behavioral health.

This program is for everyone. In the past year, CARE has provided services to people of all neighborhoods, ages, demographics, and housing statuses. When a call comes in, team members go directly on-site to where the individual(s) are. The CARE team can assist with:

- Supporting in moments of crisis ranging from housing to mental health to food access to substance use to loneliness
- Identifying next steps within the resource ecosystem
- Offering short-term case management

CONNECT TO CARE

To connect to the CARE team immediately, dial 9-1-1 and request CARE. To connect at a later time, dial (617) 349-7200 and team members will respond to your voicemail.

HOURS OF OPERATION

The CARE team responds to the community Monday through Friday. Hours of operation are:

- Mondays: 7am - 4pm
- Tuesdays: 7am - 7pm
- Wednesdays: 7am - 7pm
- Thursdays: 7am - 7pm
- Fridays: 9am - 5pm

THE TEAM

The CARE team currently consists of 12 staff members with 167 years of combined experience in crisis response, emergency medical services, clinical support, community engagement and mental and behavioral health interventions.

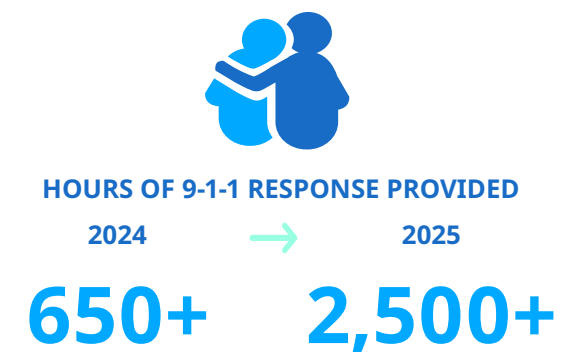
CARE IS FOR EVERYONE CONTINUED

GROWING OUR RESPONSE

We are constantly growing our operations to meet the needs of the community. In 2025, we expanded our days of operation. When we launched in July 2024, the team responded three days a week. Now, days and hours have been added. Some key dates from the past year include:

- **March:** Expanded 9-1-1 crisis response availability to five days a week.
- **July:** The one-year anniversary of CARE responding to 9-1-1 calls.

In 2025, the CARE team responded to 1,015 total crisis calls. The growing number of calls per year compared to the previous year reflects CARE's commitment to relationship building and community outreach. Additionally, it represents residents and local organizations' desire to connect with the team. CARE now responds to calls five days a week.



LEARN MORE

This report details the way CSD and CARE address the needs of the Cambridge community through operations, programs, and community connections. You are always welcome to contact the Department – whether in crisis or with any questions.

THE TEAM

The CARE team consists of experts in crisis response, emergency medical services, clinical support, and community engagement and intervention. More than 167 years of combined experience across the team allows for unique insights on crisis de-escalation, community well-being, and mental and behavioral health. When the team is dispatched to 9-1-1 crises, they use their skills to ensure the mental health of community members. All team members center compassion, dignity, and community connection.



Back row (from left to right): Jeffrey Alger, Vanessa Ashtin, Matthew Gomes, Dimitri Virgile, Kellie Foxx-Gonzalez, Donald Adams, and Van Diep.
 Front row (from left to right): Izamar Rivera-Diaz, Hannah Lerner, Katie Hewlett, Marie Mathieu, Mirna Mejia-Zapata, and Patty Contente.
 Not pictured: Jack Andreana and Marshall Lane.

HOW IT STARTED

In the spring of 2020, after witnessing the death of George Floyd and feeling the impact of countless others lost to unnecessary brutality, communities across the country began to organize around social justice. From protest to policy, Cambridge residents, city staff, local organizations, and elected officials worked together to create the Department, daring to imagine a citywide approach that decriminalizes behavioral health crisis and emphasizes appropriate interventions. The CSD's Community Assistance Response and Engagement (CARE) team is comprised of unarmed civilians with experience in crisis intervention who respond to select 9-1-1 calls for service without police.

The CARE team provides residents with a public safety response that prioritizes issues of mental and behavioral health with some of the City's most vulnerable communities. The CARE team responds to non-violent behavioral health crises independently of other first responders. These specialized teams employ their training as well as lived experiences to provide immediate and follow-up support to individuals.

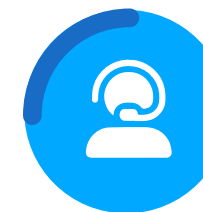
The CARE team evolved from the asks of the community, and continues to represent the community's desire for systemic change around the health and wellness of our residents.

THE SAFETY DEPARTMENT MODEL



1. CALL

A community member experiencing or witnessing a crisis calls 9-1-1.



2. DISPATCH

A City of Cambridge dispatcher identifies CARE as the appropriate resources and sends a CARE team to the scene.



3. RESPONSE

The CARE team uses their knowledge and experience to assess the situation and work with community member in crisis.



4. SUPPORT

As appropriate, the CARE team provides follow-up care coordination. This includes connecting the community member with additional services and providing direct support.

HOW WE CARE

The safety and well-being needs of the community are as diverse as its residents. The Community Safety Department and CARE team are skilled in assessing, and proactively identifying next steps in alignment with the unique contexts of each person and call. This ranges from rapport building to resource connection to crisis intervention. Calls look different for everyone.

Here are just a few examples of types of support CARE provides on scene:

Crisis Intervention and De-Escalation: CARE responders and clinicians are trained in crisis intervention and de-escalation to support individuals when they are feeling most overwhelmed and vulnerable. This includes but is not limited to mental health, suicidal ideation, and personal conflict.

Safety Planning: Individuals in a mental health crisis may experience heightened concerns, including thoughts of harm. Safety planning is an evidence-based strategy for identifying crisis triggers and developing steps for support when these feelings surface.

Resource Connection: Connecting the community member to the resources best for them. There are many City departments, non-profits, and community organizations. CARE helps identify the right type of resources for the individual.

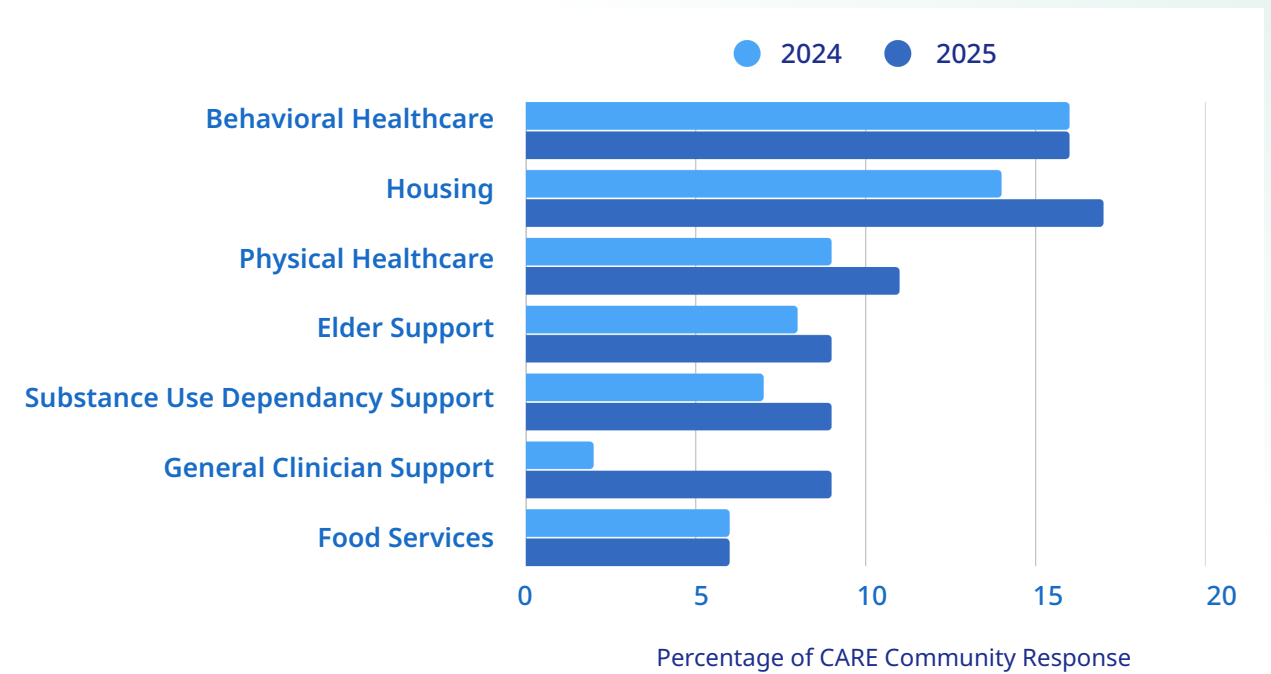
Emotional Support: A large number of calls involve heightened emotions, including chronic loneliness. CARE team members provide emotional support and assist with finding community connections.

Provision of Supplies: Community members often are in crisis due to urgent need for seasonal clothing (hot and cold temperatures), food and hydration, and overdose prevention tools.

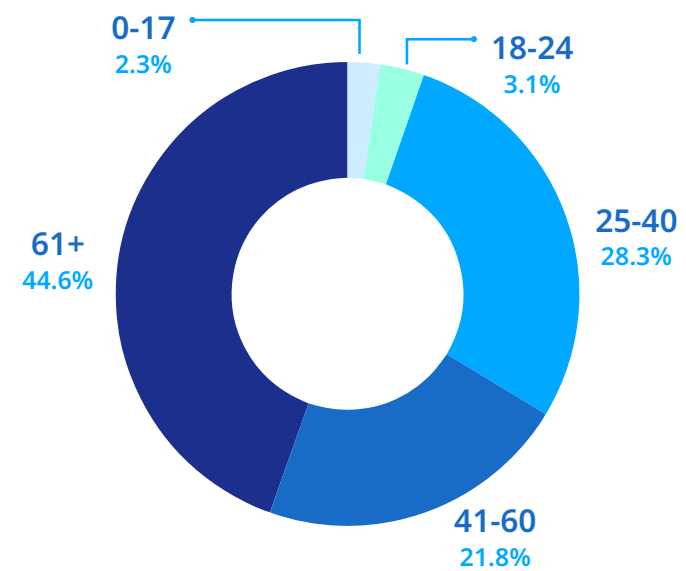
Recovery Planning: CARE has a dedicated recovery coach, who supports navigating substance use treatment options and continuum of care.

HOW WE CARE CONTINUED

TOP COMMUNITY MEMBER NEEDS CARE RESPONDS TO



COMMUNITY MEMBER AGES RESPONDED TO BY CARE



HOUSING STATUS RESPONDED TO BY CARE

74%
of CARE calls involved housed community members

26%
of CARE calls involved unhoused community members



“CARE turned a wellness check into a pathway for long-term support.”

— Dimitri Virgile, CARE Team Member

CARE SUCESS STORY— HOW CARE TRANSFORMED A WELLNESS CHECK INTO SUSTAINED SUPPORT

CARE received a call for a **wellness check** for an elderly female after a health care provider was unable to get in contact with her. The individual was not answering her phone at the time and based on her medical condition, **there was a concern for her well-being**. The team reported to the location and was able to make contact with the individual. It was apparent that she **needed more assistance** because in addition to dealing with issues with her health, she was also a caregiver for her partner.

The team connected the individual back to her health care provider since she did not have a working phone. A referral was placed for her to receive elderly support services, CARE also contacted the child who was out of state. As a result, the original individual has been **able to get the specific support she needed**. The team has provided regular follow-up meetings with the individual since the initial response and continues to work closely with her.

CRISIS RESPONSE

CARE’s alternative response model allows for individuals to contact 9-1-1 and receive unarmed, professional staff response to crisis. The following infographics represent the extensive response, case management, and community connections the Department supports in empowering the mental and behavioral health of the community.



**Mental Health is Central
to Crisis Response**

43%

of all crisis response calls
involved **mental** or **behavioral health** needs



**Police Department
Request for CARE**

70%
INCREASE

in calls where police requested CARE

CRISIS RESPONSE CONTINUED

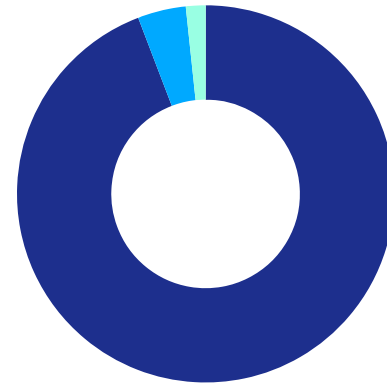
CARE provides support to the community in a multitude of ways: through 9-1-1 dispatch, referrals while engaging with community members, and direct outreach from City employees.

RESPONSE OPERATIONS PER WEEK



CARE CALLS BY TYPE

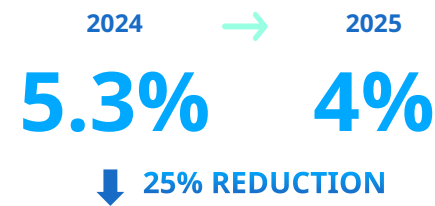
- 9-1-1 Dispatch
956 Responses
- On-Site CARE Assist
42 Responses
- Employee Support Line
17 Responses



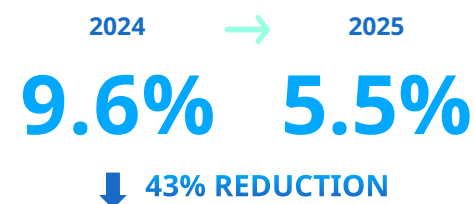
CARE increasingly resolves calls independently without police involvement in crisis management and crisis resolution. Police involvement may occasionally be called by CARE to force entry into a home in order to ensure a community member is safe and secure. As evidenced in the statistics below, CARE is able to support community mental and behavioral health and rapid crisis response independent of police presence. The need for police and emergency medical services (EMS) dispatch to the community has decreased. This reduces the burden on overworked hospital emergency rooms and first responders, and improves alternatives to hospital transport for community members.



CALLS WHERE CARE REQUESTS POLICE SUPPORT



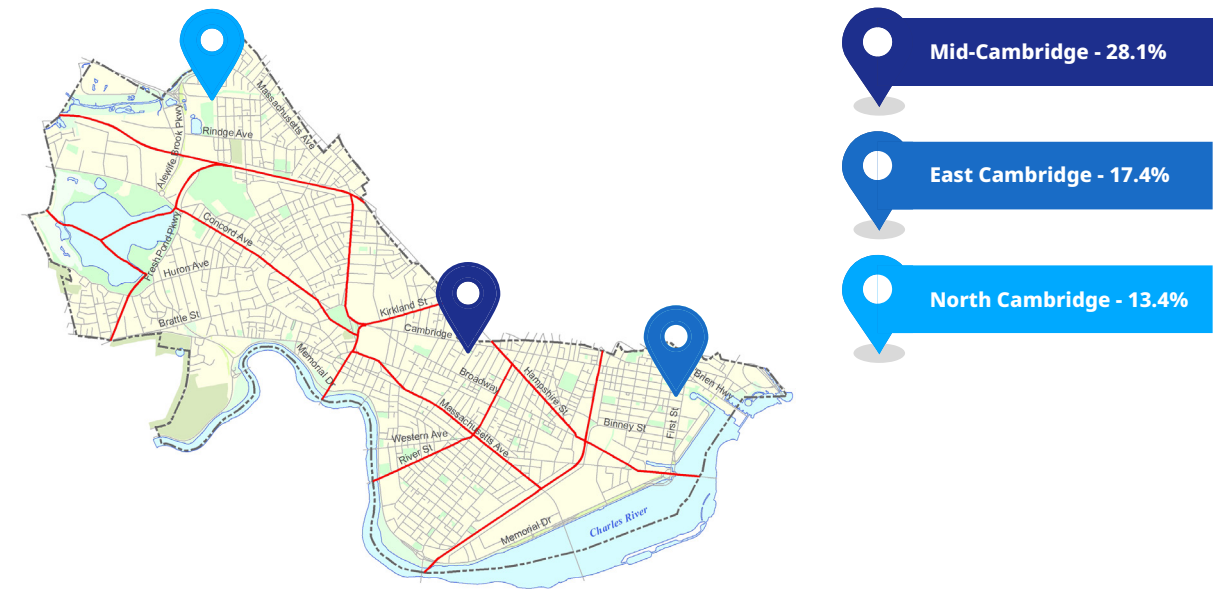
CALLS WHERE CARE REQUESTS EMS SUPPORT



CRISIS RESPONSE CONTINUED

CARE TEAM 9-1-1 RESPONSES – TOP THREE CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOODS

In 2025, the CARE team responded to 9-1-1 calls in all Cambridge neighborhoods.



PERCENTAGES BY NEIGHBORHOOD – ACROSS THE ENTIRE CITY

NEIGHBORHOOD	%
MID-CAMBRIDGE	28.1%
EAST CAMBRIDGE	17.4%
NORTH CAMBRIDGE	13.4%
WEST CAMBRIDGE	11.7%
NEIGHBORHOOD NINE	9.3%
CAMBRIDGEPORT	7.4%
RIVERSIDE	6.3%
THE PORT	5.20%
WELLINGTON-HARRINGTON	3.1%
AREA 2/MIT	2.3%
CAMBRIDGE HIGHLANDS	2.1%
STRAWBERRY HILL	2.1%
BALDWIN	1.7%



“CARE was able to assist with evaluation and avoid unnecessary hospitalization.”

—Patty Contente, LICSW
Assistant Director of Clinical Services

CARE SUCESS STORY— TURNING CRISIS INTO CARE: SUPPORTING A PARENT AND THEIR CHILDREN THROUGH DISTRESS

A parent with two school-age children was experiencing **heightened distress**, causing them to feel suicidal. CARE worked with the individual, collateral providers, CPD, and concerned friends **to assist in supporting the individual**. CARE created a protective plan for the children, should the parent need a higher level of mental health care in the future.

Months later, the stressors increased and the individual did **need a higher level of CARE**. A supportive friend was able to care for the children and avoided placement in state custody. **CARE continued to liaise, and assist with information** on community support to inform discharge planning.

The individual was **able to return to community** and has been doing well. In 2026, police began receiving calls from community about this individual. Due to previous collaborations, police requested CARE support and intervention and **CARE was able to assist with evaluation and avoid unnecessary hospitalization** (Section 12).

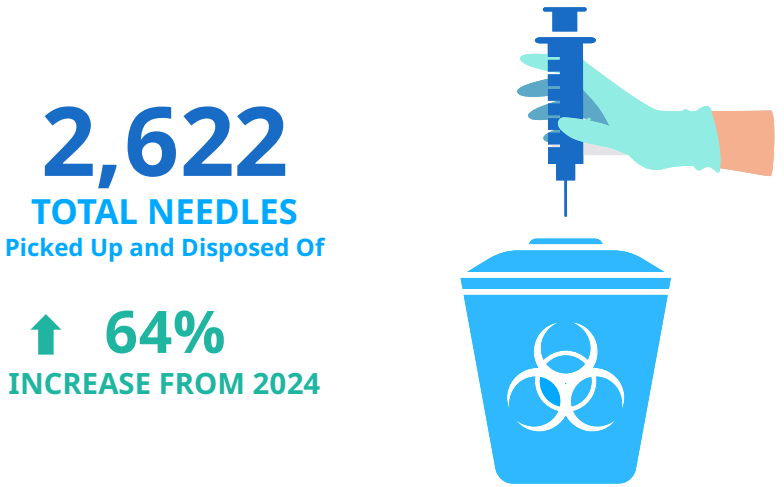
CONTINUOUS CARE

Many of the 9-1-1 calls that the CARE team responds to requires follow-up care coordination. This can include a phone call from CARE later that day or week, short-term care case management with a CARE team member, and/or referral services, depending on what the community member needs. The CARE team is committed to ensuring that they meet community members where they are and deliver the best care during and after the crisis. During the past year, CARE supported the ongoing empowerment of the community through case management and follow-up care, extensive outreach, and supplies distribution. Supply distribution is vital to ensuring the safety and well-being of all community members, regardless of housing statuses. This included providing access to food and hydration, seasonal clothing (for both extreme hot and cold temperatures), personal hygiene items, and overdose prevention tools.



NEEDLE PICKUP AND DISPOSAL

The CARE team began picking up needles in February 2024, prior to the launch of responding to 9-1-1 calls in July 2024. The safe disposal of needles mitigates harm, injury, and potential of infection. These needles cannot be disposed of in trash bins. There are needle disposal drop boxes throughout the community, but the CARE team plays a vital role in ensuring the safe disposal of needles when identified and reported to the City through mechanisms including calls to 9-1-1 and Cambridge's SeeClickFix portal. To date, the team has supported the pickup and disposal of thousands of needles across neighborhoods.



CARE TEAM NEEDLE PICKUP — TOP THREE CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOODS



CARE SUCESS STORY— FROM CRISIS TO STABILITY: COORDINATED CARE THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

The CARE team encountered a neighbor during a **wellness check** called in by a family member. After explaining our program provides support to Cambridge residents, the resident grew more comfortable and **asked to work with a female clinician** due to discomfort with men resulting from previous experiences of violence.

The community member needed support maintaining housing, managing chronic illness, and staying sober. **CARE provided regular emotional support** while **connecting her to several local resources** that could support her health and housing needs. The individual shared: "I am so grateful for all of the support you have offered me. You have been there for me during a huge crisis and without your support, I don't think I could have come this far."



"Our team was able to turn a wellness check into meaningful, lasting support for her health, housing, and well-being."

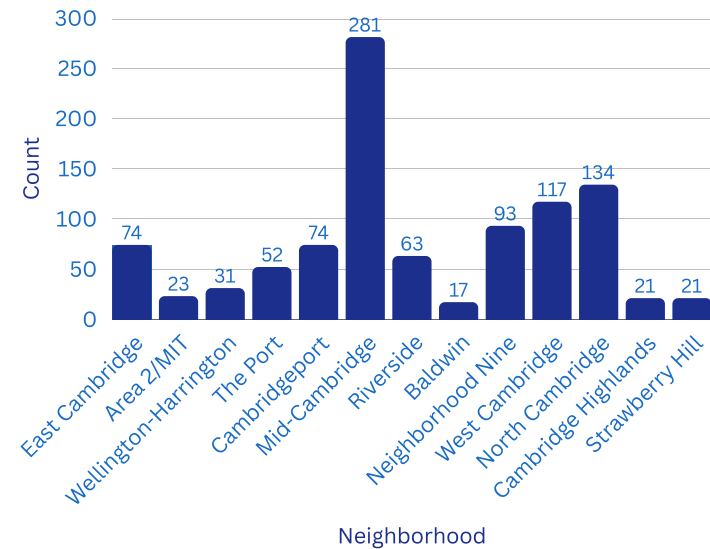
—Kellie Foxx-Gonzalez, LCSW
CARE Team Member

CHALLENGING BIASES

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT SAY:

“Only specific neighborhoods need crisis response. It doesn’t support everyone.”

IN 2025, CARE RESPONDED ACROSS NEIGHBORHOODS



CHALLENGING BIASES CONTINUED

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT SAY:

“Central Square is the major problem area for substance use in the City.”

In actuality, data shows more than **95%** of needles were picked up and disposed of outside of Central Square.

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT SAY:

“This program only serves unhoused populations of Cambridge.”

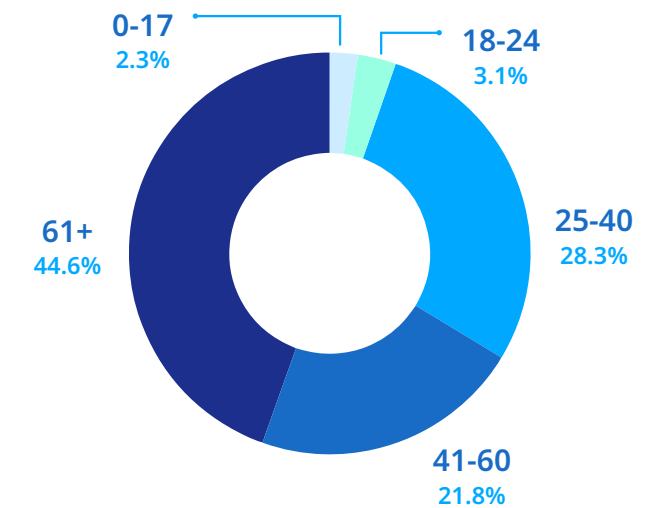


In 2025, housed individuals made up **74%** of the total calls the CARE team responded to.

SOME PEOPLE MIGHT SAY:

“The local resource ecosystem already meets the needs of our aging adults.”

COMMUNITY MEMBER AGES RESPONDED TO BY CARE



VIOLENCE PREVENTION

CARE awarded financial grants to four local organizations which delivers violence prevention programs and services to Cambridge residents. The team believes that true safety is built through relationships, trust, and care. This investment reflects a core belief that safety is not created through punishment alone; it is built through relationships, stability, opportunity, and compassion. Each organization brings a unique lens to the work that is rooted in cultural responsiveness, lived experience, and community trust. They share a common purpose: to interrupt cycles of harm and create pathways to healing, hope, and long-term well-being.

These four organizations, who have all positively impacted the Cambridge community in a variety of ways, help address and prevent multiple forms of violence and related trauma by supporting our strengths and assets so all residents and neighborhoods thrive. The following four organizations received financial grants in 2025:

- **Cambridge HEART**
- **InnerCity Weightlifting**
- **My Brother's Keeper**
- **Transition House**

For example, at Transition House, grant funds went towards more flexible, trauma-informed therapy access for families without insurance or with young children. These groups are often excluded from traditional mental health services.



ADDITIONAL UPDATES

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The Department and CARE team is dedicated to a vision of public safety crafted by the community, for the community. To pursue the mental and behavioral health journey of community members, the Department forged new partnerships and leveraged existing connections to empower all residents.

CSD partnered with the Cambridge Public Library and Public Health Department to host a series of month-long events during Mental Health Awareness month. Two mental health trainings –supporting adults and youths respectively – centered on identifying, understanding, and responding to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Participants cultivated skills for reaching out and providing initial help to those developing a mental health or substance use problem, or experiencing a crisis. A resource fair and panel discussion highlighted available resources at the city, state, and national levels.

LEARNING & GROWTH

The Department is dedicated to continuous learning and development to support the mental and behavioral health of the Cambridge community. The CARE team promotes understanding and implementation of alternative response models through knowledge exchange with other municipalities, workshops, and invited visits to higher education classrooms. Highlights from the past year include:

- Visiting Albuquerque, New Mexico and Durham, North Carolina to gain strategic insights and learn recommended practices of similar alternative response programs.
- Serving as panelists on leading statewide and national workshops advancing the growing field of alternative response.
- Presenting on the Department's mission and model to over 350 students in local schools and universities, including the University of Massachusetts system.

CSD also participates in ride alongs. Ride alongs with our public safety partners, like the Fire Department and Emergency Medical Services, helps to not only strengthen the services we provide to the community but it also allows us to learn from those who have been doing community support work well before the creation of our Department. We appreciate our public safety colleagues who have worked alongside the CARE team to train, partner in thought, and re-imagine the possibilities of community well-being.

HOW WE ARE GROWING

The Community Safety Department and the CARE team have grown tremendously in the past year, and we are proud of the strength of our programmatic roots and community impact. Looking towards the upcoming year, we strive to continue the delivery of empowering mental and behavioral health support to community members.

■ Refining Protocol and Processes

As the City continues to invest in alternative crisis response, the Department seeks to continue to refine existing protocols and cultivate new processes to empower community members. CSD seeks to continue to collaborate and streamline interdepartmental efforts with first responder partners across the City.

■ CARE Team Expansion

The Department intends to hire several additional CARE team members. This will allow the program to expand operational hours to continue to be Monday through Friday, but extend hours of operation from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

■ Employee Support Line Expansion

City employees, regardless of where they work, are able to connect with CSD to discuss any constituent needs or mental health concerns witnessed by the community. In 2026, we aim to implement our existing pilot program for an employee support line across all City departments.

■ Recovery Coach Integration

Cambridge Public Health Department (CPHD) used Opioid Abatement funds to partner with North Suffolk Community Services who employ dedicated Recovery Coaches. The Recovery Coach will work with CARE to provide recovery supports to community members. This includes people getting into substance use treatment by helping remove common barriers like transportation, bed unavailability, and navigating a difficult system.

■ Violence Prevention Efforts

Violence prevention efforts allow the community to help address and prevent multiple forms of violence and related trauma by supporting our strengths and assets so all residents and neighborhoods thrive. To expand these efforts within the Department, CSD aims to hire an Assistant Director of Violence Prevention to help spearhead these efforts. The Department will continue to financially support violence prevention efforts in the City.



CARE SUCESS STORY— REBUILDING STABILITY: FROM WARMING SHELTER TO PERMANENT HOUSING

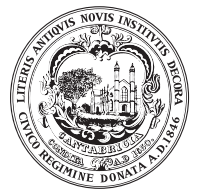
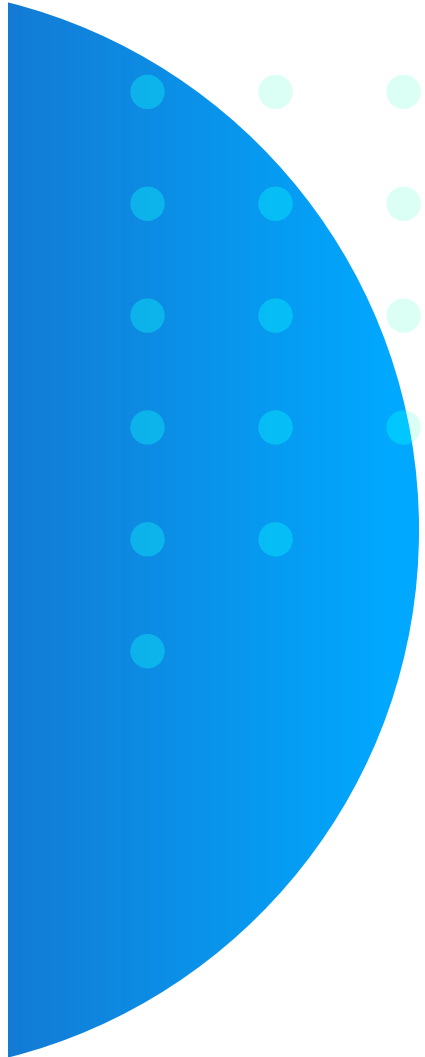
The individual first connected with the CARE team at a local shelter. The individual had **specific needs related to housing** and help with his court cases. He was sleeping at a warming shelter and eating at the Salvation Army. **CARE served as a liaison** for him, in court and assisted him in completing court-ordered mental health evaluations as well as applying for jobs.

Eventually, his court cases were dropped as a result of the work he was doing. **Then CARE worked closely alongside a local homeless coalition** to secure housing for him.



“By coordinating legal, housing, and job support, we helped a community member move toward stability.”

— Jeffrey Alger, CARE Team Member



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689 Massachusetts Avenue,
Cambridge, MA 02139

CONNECT WITH CSD

(617) 349-7200
info@cambridgesafety.org

CambridgeSafety.org



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