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# NEWS RELEASE

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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
OC Sheriff Public Affairs, 714-904-7042  
OC Health Care Agency, 657-770-1976

## **OC Sheriff partners with the OC Health Care Agency to support individuals in crisis**

**SANTA ANA, Ca. (March 15, 2024):** The Orange County Sheriff's Department, in partnership with the OC Health Care Agency (HCA), is launching a new program to better serve those experiencing homelessness or mental health disorders.

Starting in early March of 2024, the Sheriff's Department will triage non-violent and non-criminal behavioral health and homeless-related calls for service to determine if they can be diverted to OC Links, the 24-hour, 7 days a week Behavioral Health Line, an entry point for the OC HCA's continuum of care providing information, referral, linkage, screening, homeless outreach, and dispatching of mobile crisis response teams.

Dispatchers, using a series of intake questions, will triage calls to determine if a deputy response is required. If the call is determined to be non-violent and non-criminal, dispatch will transfer the caller to OC Links, where they will be connected with a trained navigator.

"When an individual is experiencing homelessness or a mental health crisis, our goal is always to provide the most effective response possible," said Don Barnes, Orange County Sheriff-Coroner. "This diversion program allows us to connect individuals in need of expert behavioral health support with the best resources."

The Orange County Sheriff's Department receives about 10,000 calls for service each year involving mental health, individuals experiencing homelessness, and similar crises. OC Links provides specifically trained navigators who specialize in connecting individuals experiencing mental health disorders, homelessness, or substance use disorders with appropriate behavioral health services and field outreach. OC Links dispatches counselors to non-violent and non-criminal calls instead of deputies, allowing deputies to be more readily available for in-progress crimes and proactive policing.

If additional assistance is needed or requested, deputies and/or fire personnel will be dispatched.

"This partnership between the Orange County Sheriff's Department and OC Health Care Agency exemplifies our commitment to providing comprehensive support for individuals in crisis," said Dr. Veronica Kelley, Director of Behavioral Health Services at OC Health Care Agency. "By integrating law enforcement and behavioral health expertise, we can better address the complex needs of our community."

The Sheriff's Department continues to deploy its Behavioral Health Bureau teams in partnership with OC HCA Psychiatric Emergency Response Teams (PERT), responsible for proactively contacting and supporting those experiencing mental health crises and homelessness in the community, and connecting individuals with resources including housing programs, counseling services, and other support services.

The public can access OC Links 24/7 by calling (855) 625-4657 or (855) OC Links.

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