

Bridging the gap

By Carlene Brown

As law enforcement is evolving rapidly, police face new threats and challenges along with increased scrutiny from the public and the media. The law enforcement profession is responding with significant changes in the areas of community policing, culture, and policy including dealing with the mentally ill.

Research suggests that approximately two million people with serious mental illness are booked into jails in the United States each year. Some studies have determined that an estimated 1 in 4 people with mental illness have a history of police arrest and nearly 15% of men and 30% of women booked into jails have a serious mental health condition. Based off this information, it is not a surprise that police officers often find themselves face-to-face with people experiencing mental health crises and are grappling with how to manage this responsibility.

One approach has been to provide police with more Crisis Intervention Training which involves how to recognize signs of mental illness and get people to treatment. Another approach involves partnering with mental health professionals such as social workers or mental health advocates, aka “Navigators” to bridge the gap.

Many of our members have expressed an interest in partnering with a mental health professional while they are responding to calls. This would mean that the police would form partnerships with their local mental health agencies and advocates in addition to other police departments to transform how they approach people in a mental health crisis.

WCIA recommends that prior to drafting the agreement, the parties meet to determine how liability will be handled if a claim or lawsuit is triggered. Having an established agreement will provide a more seamless process for handling any claim or lawsuit arising out of operations conducted.

The parties to the agreement may be WCIA members or non-members thus providing different liability coverage terms and limits. Knowing coverage issues in advance will play a role in determining how the involved parties will decide to handle the apportionment of liability should a claim or lawsuit be received.

Indemnification language to establish how liability will be apportioned can be found in our Liability Resources Manual. The Liability Resource Manual is available through the Member Resources page on the WCIA website: <http://www.wciapool.org/member-resources>. As with any agreement, the member’s City attorney should always review the agreement prior to it being signed.

Your WCIA Risk Management Representative is also available to review the agreement from an insurance and risk management perspective and can assist with determining the types and amounts of coverage to require.