



Pennsylvania
**Commission on Crime
and Delinquency**

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Shapiro Administration Launches New Crisis Intervention Technical Assistance Initiative in Berks County

PCCD's new statewide Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Technical Assistance Center—the first-of-its-kind in the nation—will strengthen and support crisis intervention programs across the Commonwealth, helping law enforcement and first responders keep Pennsylvanians safe by providing more resources during emergencies

Since January 2024, Berks County CIT has trained 67 first responders, law enforcement officers, and other professionals

Berks, PA — The **Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)** joined local leaders, law enforcement, and behavioral health professionals in Berks County today to announce a new statewide Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Technical Assistance Center initiative and highlight Berks County's work to enhance responses for individuals in crisis and community safety.

CIT helps law enforcement and first responders safely respond to a wide range of emergency situations, providing them with more resources to de-escalate situations, prioritize safety, and ensure Pennsylvanians have access to the care they need. CIT is a collaborative model that brings together local law enforcement personnel, first responders, correctional facility staff, probation and parole officers, mental health professionals, and community advocates. Together, they work to ensure a coordinated response to individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.

"Crisis intervention programs and trainings have made a critical difference for individuals experiencing crisis, including here in Berks County. This new initiative marks a major step forward in how we support communities across Pennsylvania responding to individuals when they need it most," said **Jackie Weaknecht, Director of PCCD's Office of Justice Programs**. "The CIT Technical Assistance Center will not only help counties build and strengthen their CIT programs, but it will also ensure that they're grounded in best practices, connected with others doing the work, and equipped with the tools needed to create real, lasting change. It's about building a smarter, more compassionate response system."

PCCD's new CIT Technical Assistance Center initiative aims to create a comprehensive "one-stop shop" offering personalized support to counties with existing or developing CIT programs. The initiative will help counties expand their programs by providing consultation, training, and other support services.

[Studies](#) found that CIT programs have been shown to improve officer satisfaction and confidence, promote safer outcomes, and increase the likelihood of diversion from jail to mental health services.

"CIT training enables law enforcement to recognize and react appropriately to difficult situations, trains them to handle crises in a manner that de-escalates the conflict and crisis, and allows law enforcement to better determine which individuals should be diverted to the mental health system to receive help," said **John Adams, Berks County District Attorney**. "Arresting individuals in crisis is rarely the best outcome. Our diversion team in Berks County is robust and their work is leading to positive outcomes for many."

The Shapiro Administration has invested nearly \$2 million to date on the implementation, expansion, establishment, and assessment of CIT programs and trainings, and co-responder model programs across the Commonwealth. With PCCD funding, 40 counties have established CIT programs since 2010.

"CIT is often thought of as the trainings for first responders but it's so much more than that," said **Pam Seaman, Berks County Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities Program Administrator**. "It's also about reducing stigma and building an effective crisis response system that pulls together to better serve individuals with behavioral health concerns when they cross paths with the criminal justice system."

Established in January of 2024, Berks County's CIT Trainings are led by the Mental Health Forensic Diversion Team at Connections Work, in collaboration with the Berks County Mental Health/Development Disabilities Program Office, and with sponsorship by Alvernia University. Since that time, Berks County CIT has trained 67 first responders, law enforcement officers, and other professionals.

"CIT training is more than just a 40-hour course---it is a shift in mindset," said **Kristy Belschwinder, Forensic Diversion Program Manager, Connections Work**. "It empowers officers to see beyond the behavior, recognize the human need, and respond with skill, empathy, and purpose."

The week-long training covers topics including suicide prevention, crisis de-escalation, officer wellness, mental health myths/facts, autism, bipolar disorder, substance use disorder, emergency response, and more. The training is a combination of classroom learning, lessons from mental health professionals, and virtual/hands-on live scenarios with actors.

Funding for PCCD's new CIT Technical Assistance Center will come from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance's Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP). BJA approved Pennsylvania's FY 2024 Byrne SCIP Funding Plan on April 14, 2025.

Learn more about the approved [SCIP funding plan](#) and other initiatives on [PCCD's website](#).

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