



First Response Transformation Campaign

The right response, at the right time—rooted in care



“There’s a need for culturally competent, compassionate, empathetic, and unbiased first response.” – *Elder Toni McNeil, FRTC partner & Executive Director of Concrete Development, Inc.*

What is the First Response Transformation Campaign?

The First Response Transformation Campaign, led by **Public Health Advocates**, is working to **make alternative response available in communities across California**. Given the rising number of 911 calls related to mental health and homelessness, alternative response programs have become as essential as the other three branches of first response: police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS). We envision a world where emergency responders address the needs they are most qualified to address. **We want communities to provide the right response, at the right time—rooted in care.**

What is alternative response?

Alternative response units show up to meet people’s needs in situations that don’t require the unique skills of police, fire, or EMS services. Alternative responders are qualified to respond to **mental health crises, substance use, homelessness, conflict mediation, and other situations that may require empathy, de-escalation, and behavioral health training**. This approach is growing; 62% of the largest 50 cities in the US created an alternative response program between 2020 and 2022¹.



Modesto residents participate in a listening session about first response hosted by Public Health Advocates.

How does our campaign work?

We provide technical assistance to advocates in California to help them strengthen existing alternative response programs or design new ones that fit their communities' needs. We currently do this work in five cities: **Modesto, Sacramento, San Diego, Stockton, and Vallejo**. Our closest partners are our **community catalysts**—local advocates whose efforts we support to advance alternative response programs.

For expertise and guidance, we appoint an **Equity Advisory Group** that includes leaders in emergency response and individuals with expertise in the ways race, gender, disability, immigration status, and language affect how people experience emergencies.

What do other first responders say about alternative response?

Conversations about alternative response can stir up fear about funding and job security. Yet, increasingly **police, fire, and EMS leaders show support for these programs**. Alternative responders free up police to focus on crime and safety²; give firefighters more time to address fires and complex non-fire emergencies; and allow EMS technicians to concentrate on medical emergencies—the work they are each best trained to handle.

How can you get involved?

If you would like to join this campaign or start a conversation with us, please contact Ryan McClinton: RMC@phadvocates.org.

To learn more about the First Response Transformation Campaign, visit linktr.ee/firstresponsetransformation.



Vallejo residents participate in a listening session about first response hosted by Public Health Advocates.

¹ Route 50. <https://www.route-fifty.com/workforce/2024/08/how-cities-are-rethinking-who-responds-911-calls/398522/>

² University of Michigan, The Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy. <https://closup.umich.edu/sites/closup/files/2025-02/MPPS-Spring-2024-Alternative-Response.pdf>

