

CROA 2025 Legislative Priorities

Co-response, or the practice of embedding behavioral health and clinical teams within the first response system, is an invaluable tool across the state to address people experiencing behavioral health emergencies. It is an essential service for many fire departments, police departments, 911 call centers, cities, and counties and is a critical part of the state's behavioral health system. A recent analysis by the University of Washington mapped these critical resources across Washington and identified a gap in coordination with other elements of the crisis response system.

CROA's 2025 recommended legislative agenda **identifies three priorities** for the upcoming session. The priorities are:

1. Develop Co-Response Workforce:

- "Co-response" means a multidisciplinary partnership between first responders and human services professionals that responds to emergency situations involving behavioral or mental health crises and people experiencing complex medical needs. Co-response teams include public safety telecommunicators, law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and paramedics. Human services professionals include social workers, behavioral health clinicians, advanced registered nurse practitioners, registered nurses, community health workers, and peer support specialists. Co-responders may provide call-for-service crisis response and follow-up care including case management, resource navigation, and transportation.

2. Peer Support System:

- Ensuring robust legal protections for privileged communication is essential for co-responders involved in peer support. These protections facilitate open dialogue and trust, allowing individuals to share sensitive information without fear of legal repercussions.

3. Re-Appropriation:

- HB 2245: Maintain funding from SB 5644, passed in 2022, for co-response training and certification, building on the work of the University of Washington's School of Social Work. Funding is currently being used to develop a 40-hour training/certificate program for behavioral health professionals and first responders. Additionally, funding supports an annual conference that attracts state and national co-responders and an annual assessment regarding the co-response workforce.

CONTACT:

Brad Banks, Banks Consulting Group
brad@banksconsultinggroup.com

Vanessa Martin, CROA Managing Director
Director@croawa.org



CO-RESPONDER OUTREACH ALLIANCE

- Co-Response Fire Proviso: Expand funding resources for fire-based co-response programs within the emergency response system, bringing together critical, multi-disciplinary approaches to address complex medical and behavioral health needs in the field, and to spur innovation in key areas to strengthen Washington's crisis care continuum.
- Training and Peer Support Program Proviso: Maintain the proviso that was successfully passed in 2024, which allocates \$535,000 to the University of Washington School of Social Work (UW). This funding is intended to establish and develop a curriculum for a crisis response training academy for teams of first responders and mental health professionals in three behavioral health regional service areas inclusive of planning for a certificate program. Additionally, UW is to collaborate with CROA to develop and pilot a statewide internal peer support program. This program is designed to assist co-response professionals who have faced life-threatening or traumatic incidents that occur while on the job. This significant provision solidifies co-response services and training as integral components of the crisis care continuum.

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