



AGENDA REPORT


TO: Jestin D. Johnson
City Administrator

FROM: Damon Covington
Fire Chief
Oakland Fire Department

SUBJECT: Informational Report on the MACRO
Program

DATE: April 29, 2025

City Administrator Approval


Jestin Johnson (May 16, 2025 08:31 PDT)

Date: **May 16, 2025**

RECOMMENDATION

Staff Recommends The Oakland City Council Receive An Informational Report On The Progress Of The City Of Oakland's Mobile Assistance Community Responders Of Oakland ("MACRO") Pilot Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the current staffing capacity of the program, an overview of response data for 2024 and the first quarter of 2025, and details regarding the forthcoming independent evaluation of the program's implementation.

BACKGROUND / LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The Mobile Assistance Community Responders of Oakland (MACRO) Program was launched in April 2022, as the City of Oakland sought to establish an alternative response program housed in the Oakland Fire Department to respond to non-emergency, "quality of life" calls for service in Oakland.

Since then, the Fire Department and MACRO representatives have presented before the full City Council, the Public Safety Committee, the Safety Services Oversight Commission, the Commission on Homelessness, and the Mayor's Commission on Persons with Disabilities (MCPD).

Public Safety Committee
May 27, 2025

ANALYSIS AND POLICY ALTERNATIVES

MACRO was launched with the goal of advancing the Citywide priorities of **1) Holistic Community Safety** and **2) Housing, Economic, and Cultural Security**. The program continues to pursue and evaluate itself based on those priority goals.

MACRO enhances holistic community safety by deploying trained, unarmed teams to respond to non-emergency, non-violent incidents—especially those involving mental health, substance use, and housing instability. This community-centered approach reduces unnecessary law enforcement involvement, minimizes the risk of escalation, and builds public trust through trauma-informed care. By prioritizing connection over enforcement, MACRO fosters a safer, more responsive public safety system grounded in compassion and accountability.

Through its field-based outreach and resource referral services, MACRO supports individuals experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, or substance use disorders—key barriers to housing and economic stability. By connecting individuals to shelters, health services, and support organizations, MACRO helps address root causes of insecurity. Its culturally responsive model also ensures services are accessible and respectful of Oakland's diverse communities, reinforcing long-term goals of equity, stability, and social inclusion.

Staffing

MACRO currently employs 17 Community Intervention Specialists (CIS) and 9 Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). MACRO is actively seeking to hire 2–5 additional EMTs to strengthen our capacity to deliver timely, compassionate crisis response in the field.

EMTs are key to MACRO's community-based approach. Their ability to provide immediate care helps divert non-violent, non-emergency incidents from traditional emergency services—freeing up resources and reducing the burden on police, fire, and hospital systems.

This staffing model not only improves service delivery for residents experiencing homelessness, substance use issues, or behavioral health challenges, but also supports broader goals of safety and equity for underserved communities.

MACRO 2024 Output Summary Report

The 2024 MACRO Output Summary Report (***Attachment A***) provides a comprehensive overview of the Mobile Assistance Community Responders of Oakland (MACRO) program, non-police, community-based emergency response initiative housed within the Oakland Fire Department. MACRO teams composed of Community Intervention Specialists and EMTs respond to non-violent, non-emergency calls related to wellness checks, behavioral health concerns, and minor community disturbances, with a particular focus on serving unsheltered populations. The program aims to reduce the burden on police and emergency medical services while connecting vulnerable individuals to needed resources.

In 2024, MACRO responded to 6,309 incidents, with 3,437 (58%) initiated by dispatch and 2,526 (42%) identified by on-view field encounters. Notably, dispatch calls surpassed on-view responses for the first time since the program's launch, largely due to increased staffing,

expanded operating hours, and the introduction of a dedicated phone line in March 2024. Dispatch sources included Oakland Police (OPD) (42%) and OFD's MACRO direct line and email (58%).

Importantly, MACRO dispatched responses diverted 34% of calls away from law enforcement and emergency services, a figure that aligns with the upper range of diversion projections identified in the report *The Impacts of Alternative Mobile Crisis Response for Clients, Community, and Public Safety* by Claire Herbert, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon. The study finds that Mobile Crisis Response (MCR) teams can safely divert 21–38% of law enforcement calls. MACRO's performance demonstrates its growing role in reducing the burden on police while delivering specialized, community-centered care tailored to the needs of Oakland residents.

Most incidents occurred in Downtown Oakland (Zone 7) and on city streets (72%), reflecting MACRO's emphasis on addressing the needs of unhoused residents. The most common type of incident was a wellness check (54%), followed by sleeping checks (28%) and behavioral concerns (15%). Nearly 98% of incidents were resolved on-site without requiring police or EMS intervention. MACRO also expanded its staff from 11 to 27 full-time employees, added a shift supervisor role, and provided thousands of resource referrals, basic needs supplies, and transportation supports—solidifying its critical role in Oakland's evolving public safety and crisis response system.

MACRO Q1 2025 Output & Response Report

The MACRO Q1 2025 Output & Response Report (***Attachment B***) highlights the program's continued role in providing community-centered crisis response across Oakland. From January through March 2025, MACRO teams responded to 1,831 incidents, with 64% initiated by dispatch and 36% occurring on-view. Notably, 67% of dispatches came directly through the OFD phone line and email, while 33% were transferred from 911/OPD. Wellness checks accounted for the majority (62%) of incident types, followed by sleeper checks (23%) and behavioral concerns (12%).

MACRO demonstrated high effectiveness in resolving incidents in the field—97% of all responses were resolved onsite by MACRO teams, with only 3% requiring referral to OPD or EMS. The Downtown Oakland area (Zone 7) consistently generated the highest call volume, while the Oakland Hills (Zone 8) had the lowest. MACRO also facilitated 267 service referrals during this period, with St. Vincent De Paul and City Team being the most frequently utilized partner organizations.

Phone line engagement remained strong, with 74% of 1,465 incoming calls reaching an OFD dispatcher and nearly half of those (47%) meeting MACRO eligibility for field response. These outcomes reflect MACRO's growing capacity to divert non-emergency calls from traditional public safety agencies, deliver immediate support in the field, and connect individuals to critical services.

Program Evaluation

The [University of Chicago Health Lab](#) is partnering to conduct an implementation evaluation of the alternative response strategies, including: 1) descriptive analyses of the related public safety response data and MACRO response intervention arms; 2) qualitative interviews with key emergency response stakeholders; and 3) ongoing operational observations as well as document and policy review. Through a detailed implementation evaluation, Health Lab will test program logistics, providing critical insight into how the program is functioning and allowing the partners to identify and resolve potential operational challenges prior to broader implementation and an outcome evaluation. The implementation evaluation plan will build toward a rigorous causal evaluation, which we will plan to conduct within the earliest feasible timeframe.

Activities will include creating detailed documentation of the planning and pilot implementation process, including details about staffing and training; program operations; the nature and intensity of services offered; collaboration between partners; how decisions are made; and the context and community in which the interventions are delivered.

About Health Lab: The Health Lab works closely with government and nonprofit partners to identify, rigorously evaluate, and help scale programs and policies that improve health outcomes and reduce health inequities, particularly for urban residents. Most pertinent to the current evaluation plan, the Health Lab has an extensive project portfolio aimed at better understanding the 911 system and emergency response. The Health Lab led Transform911, a foundational project bringing together experts, practitioners, policymakers, and communities for a national dialogue on the nation's 911 system in order to create a Blueprint for Change and actionable policy recommendations that can begin to address issues with our nation's 911 system

MACRO is partnering with the **University of Chicago Health Lab** to evaluate the program's implementation. This includes:

- Data analysis of public safety responses
- Interviews with emergency response stakeholders
- Operational observations and policy reviews

This evaluation will help refine the program and guide future planning. It also lays the foundation for a formal outcome evaluation, with a goal of measuring long-term impact and effectiveness.

The Health Lab—nationally recognized for its work on emergency response reform, including the **Transform911** initiative—brings deep expertise in public health, safety, and urban service innovation.

FISCAL IMPACT

This item is for informational purposes only and does not have a direct fiscal impact.

However, the MACRO program has the potential to deliver **significant long-term fiscal benefits** to the City of Oakland through cost avoidance and system efficiencies. By diverting non-violent, non-emergency calls away from police, fire, and ambulance services, MACRO helps reduce the operational burden—and associated costs—on these high-cost emergency response systems.

Each emergency call handled by MACRO instead of traditional responders can result in measurable savings in personnel time, fuel, vehicle wear-and-tear, and emergency room transports. Additionally, MACRO's early interventions may prevent the escalation of crises, reducing downstream costs related to hospitalizations, incarceration, or prolonged homelessness.

As MACRO continues to grow, its emphasis on preventative care and connection to services could further reduce public expenditures on high-frequency service users and emergency system overload—creating a more efficient and sustainable public safety ecosystem. These outcomes align with fiscally responsible governance, offering a data-driven model for maximizing public resources while improving service delivery for Oakland residents.

PUBLIC OUTREACH / INTEREST

The Oakland Fire Department's establishment of the MACRO Community Advisory Board in May 2022 was a pivotal step in ensuring that the program remained grounded in community needs and accountability. Comprised of local leaders and advocates, the Advisory Board was designed to provide oversight, guidance, and feedback on MACRO's operations, aligning its services with the expectations of Oakland residents. The Advisory Board's involvement underscores the importance of community engagement in shaping public safety alternatives, ensuring that initiatives like MACRO evolve to meet the diverse needs of Oakland's population.

COORDINATION

There was no interdepartmental coordination required for the development of this report.

SUSTAINABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Economic:

MACRO creates pathways to economic sustainability through workforce development and employment. By hiring community-based staff—including EMTs and Community Intervention Specialists—MACRO provides living-wage jobs with professional training, benefits, and advancement opportunities. Many team members bring lived experience and local knowledge,

allowing the program to invest directly in the communities it serves while cultivating a trauma-informed public health workforce that reflects Oakland's values and demographics.

Environmental:

While MACRO is primarily a public safety and health initiative, it also contributes to the City's environmental goals in meaningful ways. By reducing reliance on traditional emergency vehicles—such as fire engines or ambulances—for non-emergency calls, MACRO helps lower fuel use, vehicle emissions, and overall environmental strain on the city's emergency response infrastructure.

Additionally, MACRO teams often engage with unsheltered residents in public spaces, offering referrals to services that reduce environmental hazards such as debris accumulation or improper waste disposal in encampments. Over time, this outreach can help support cleaner, safer, and more sustainable public spaces.

Race and Equity:

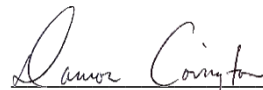
At its core, MACRO is a racial equity strategy. Traditional emergency response systems have disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. MACRO disrupts that pattern by offering an alternative rooted in care, not criminalization. The program is grounded in equity principles—prioritizing culturally competent services, accountability to impacted communities, and systems-level change. Through both its service model and staffing practices, MACRO helps reimagine public safety in a way that centers equity and justice.

ACTION REQUESTED OF THE CITY COUNCIL

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For questions regarding this report, please contact Michael Hunt, Chief of Staff, Oakland Fire Department, at mhunt@oaklandca.gov and Elliott Jones, MACRO Program Manager, at EJones3@oakandca.gov.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments (2):

- [MACRO 2024 Output Summary Report](#) [Attachment A]
- [MACRO Q1 2025 Output & Response Report](#) [Attachment B]