



PAD COMMUNITY REFERRAL EXPANSION COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS REPORT



The purpose of the Atlanta/Fulton Pre-Arrest Diversion (PAD) Community Listening Sessions were to invite members of the community to share their experiences on community issues and their perspectives on the expansion of PAD services, including the proposal to respond to community referrals through the City of Atlanta's 311 non-emergency city services line. Three community listening sessions were hosted throughout the month of September where community members provided qualitative and quantitative data related to their neighborhood perspective, and the expansion of PAD services. This report highlights the themes of community responses and builds upon PAD's Community Referral Survey (2020).

Over the course of three
listening sessions

185

**COMMUNITY MEMBERS
SHARED THIER PERSPECTIVE
ON THE PAD EXPANSION
PROCESS**

Co-Hosted By:

1. Black Futurists Group
2. Georgia Equality
3. Solutions Not Punishments Co.
4. Sister Love
5. Annie E. Casey Foundation
6. Urban League of Greater Atlanta
7. Southerners On New Ground
8. Gateway Center
9. Little Five Points Business Association
10. Women On The Rise
11. St. Mark United Methodist Church
12. Atlanta Downtown Neighborhood Association
13. Midtown Neighborhood Association
14. 4Ward Working Group
15. Movement for Black Lives

To expand PAD's awareness of issues within their communities, members shared stories about what they see in their local neighborhoods.



Community member stories highlighted the following:

- Mental-health challenges within their communities.
- Over-policing within their communities.
- Community members experiencing homelessness.
- Interpersonal and intimate partner violence within communities.
- Community members experiencing challenges with drug-use.
- Community members experiencing issues related to jails, prisons, and probation.

During each Community Listening Session we asked community members to identify when the current system has worked well, or struggled to address issues related to poverty, mental health needs, and substance use.



Community member responses:

- There's a lack of cultural competency when dealing with the community.
- When police are called for community issues their response is often punitive.
- When there is crisis, the wait time for system responses is often too long.
- Insufficient services are available related to mental health and drug use.
- The system is inherently exclusive to trans and queer communities.
- Communities often experiences racism when dealing with the system.

To place community members in the shoes of PAD staff, and to strengthen their understanding of a potential interaction with someone experiencing poverty, or challenges with mental health needs and substance use, community members were presented with a real-world scenario where PAD staff interact with a community member that does not seem to be interested in receiving PAD services.

Scenario 1



A business owner on Cascade Road calls 311 because of a woman who is standing in front of their business without clothes on. The business owner tells the 311 Dispatcher that the woman is being a distraction and refuses to move when asked. The 311 Dispatcher contacts a PAD Harm Reduction team, who responds to the scene and observes a young woman sitting on the curb with no pants or shoes on. The PAD team starts a conversation with her and the woman states that she is okay and does not want to go anywhere. The team describes the type of services available through PAD and then offers her food, water, and clean clothing. PAD asks for some basic information about her identity and where she spends her time. The woman declines to answer, but does accept the food, water and the clothing. The PAD lets her know that they will come by again tomorrow to check on her.

1. Would you consider this a successful outcome?
2. What follow-up should be provided to the business owner?

Response Themes



- Community members felt that generally the interaction was successful.
- Community members also felt that interactions that avoided the need of police were successful.
- When clients receive food, clothing, and other resources community members considered it to be successful.
- Community members felt that protecting the client's autonomy and consent are both imperative.
- Staff should further engagement with the business owner to ensure use of alternative of policing.
- Staff should share contact information with business owner in the event that the client shows up again.
- Staff should continue to educate the business owner on PAD services.
- Staff should leverage their relationship with the business owner to recruit more community participation.



To place community members in the shoes of PAD staff, and to strengthen their understanding of a potential interaction with someone experiencing poverty, or challenges with mental health needs and substance use, community members were presented with a real-world scenario where PAD staff interact with a community member who gets agitated when approached by PAD staff.

Scenario 2



A community member calls 311 to report that there is a man who is laying in the middle of a sidewalk on Spring Street downtown, and pedestrians are having to walk around him. He is a man in his 50s who appears to be disheveled and has a sign beside him that says “Homeless Veteran, God Bless.” When the PAD Harm Reduction team arrives, they introduce themselves to the individual and begin telling him about the services that the agency offers. The individual becomes agitated while PAD staff is talking with him. He begins yelling at the PAD team, and then stands up and tells staff that he has a knife and will pull it out if people keep bothering him. He continues to hold his hand in his pocket while threatening the PAD team and pedestrians attempting to walk by.

1. What do you think the PAD team should do in this circumstance?
2. In what circumstance should the PAD team call the police?

Response Themes



- PAD team should prioritize their safety by disengaging or leaving if they feel their safety is threatened.
- PAD team should always work in pairs to ensure their safety.
- PAD team should be well trained on de-escalation tactics to prevent any violence.
- PAD team should collaborate with other local mental health organizations, especially if the community member is in crisis.
- Calling the police should be a last resort.
- If the police are introduced to the scene, PAD team should stay to ensure community member safety and maintain the option for diversion.



The PAD Community Listening Sessions functioned as an opportunity to educate community members on the history and services that PAD has to offer. Following this education, community members identified how likely they would be to use PAD's harm reduction services to respond to community concerns.

83%

Eighty-three percent of community members would be likely to call 311 if they saw someone causing a public disturbance.

85%

Eighty-five percent of community members would be likely to call 311 if they saw someone using drugs in a public space.

71%

Seventy-one percent of community members would be likely to call 311 if they saw someone trading sex for money or goods in a public space.





When community members are presented with an option to engage in the community referral process through 311

98%

of community members believed the option to call 311 for community concerns related to mental health, substance use, and poverty would make their community safer.