



Office of the City Manager

August 26, 2024

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: LaTanya Bellow, Interim City Manager
Re: Specialized Care Unit (SCU) Program Update

The following memo provides an update on the Specialized Care Unit's current operations, how the team has progressed, common services provided, and what to expect during this next phase of the pilot program.

SCU Operations

The Specialized Care Unit was developed to provide a process and services to respond to a diverse set of mental health crises, minimize the use of law enforcement, facilitate appropriate referrals, and determine next steps for each client. Berkeley's program is a contracted partnership between various City Departments, led by the Department of Health, Housing, and Community Services and community provider, Bonita House, Inc. The 3-person Bonita House staff on the care unit are one Peer Support Specialist, one Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), and one Clinician.

The SCU began pilot program operations on September 5, 2023. In the early stage of program implementation, the SCU provided daily services during daytime hours, and over the last few months has greatly expanded. Current ongoing initiatives include efforts by the team to recruit, hire, and train staff to reach the full 24 hours a day, 7 days per week model. Aligned with the initial goal of the program, the SCU currently operates 24 hours except for one last shift that should be staffed within the next two months.

Summary of available services provided by the SCU

During operating hours, the SCU team provides services to people in Berkeley witnessing or experiencing a crisis during the following scheduled service hours:

- Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday: 24-hour services
- Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday: 20 hours per day, excluding 4pm to 8 pm.

Community members who witness or experience a mental health or substance use crisis can call the SCU at (510) 948-0075. Common symptoms of a crisis may include someone unable to calm down, showing signs of distress, or threats of harming themselves or others, as well as concerns around substance use. If an urgent medical response is required, community members should call 911.

Summary of SCU activities since the launch of the program

Since launching in September 2023, the SCU has received approximately 1,000 calls for service. These calls for service have been from individuals experiencing a crisis, or community members witnessing one. The SCU has provided services to both housed and unhoused individuals, as well as to adults and minors. Initial data shows that the SCU has provided a slightly larger share of services to unhoused community members, but many housed community members have also received SCU services. Some calls to the SCU can be resolved over the phone and others require a field response.

Since September 2023, the SCU has dispatched a team to over 500 calls and provided services to approximately 250 separate individuals. Typical services provided include safety planning, clinical assessments, de-escalation, and transportations to other community services or the hospital, if accepted. When necessary, the SCU will conduct an assessment to determine if a client needs to be placed on a psychiatric hold, 5150 for adults or 5585 for minors. To date, the SCU has written approximately fifty 5150/5585 psychiatric holds.

Current efforts to Evaluate the SCU

The Health, Housing and Community Services Department (HHCS) is in contract with Resource Development Associates (RDA) with a scope to conduct a retrospective evaluation of the SCU pilot program. This evaluation will examine overall program effectiveness, identify successes, and recommend solutions to overcome challenges throughout the pilot period. This retrospective evaluation will examine data from November 2023 through October 2024 from Bonita House and also include key stakeholder interviews as well as elements of community engagement. This evaluation will also include data from the program ramp-up months, from September and October 2023. HHCS expects to receive the initial draft of the evaluation in spring 2025.

SCU Steering Committee & Community Engagement

The original purpose of the Steering Committee, established in early 2021 by former HHCS Director Dr. Lisa Warhuus. The scope of the Steering committee included working collaboratively to conduct the community engagement process, propose a program design based on the results and ensure launch of a pilot program aligned with the plan set forth by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee has been exceptionally successful in reaching its goals. Designing the SCU and bringing the

program to fruition would not have been possible without the time, dedication, and expertise of the SCU Steering Committee members.

The Steering Committee was established in winter 2021 to provide direct community feedback to the design process of the Specialized Care Unit in partnership with the City of Berkeley. The Steering Committee is made up of a combination of community members and City of Berkeley staff. Community representation includes the Berkeley Mental Health Commission, Berkeley Community Safety Coalition, Lifelong Medical, Consider the Homeless, and other advocacy and care-based organizations in Berkeley. City representation includes staff from HHCS, including the Mental Health Division, as well as the Berkeley Fire Department and City Manager's Office. Once contracted with the City, Bonita House crisis program leadership has also joined the Steering Committee.

This Steering Committee has provided valuable feedback and insight throughout three important phases of the SCU project:

1. Design: Steering Committee members worked closely with RDA on the design documents for the SCU and provided detailed analysis on each recommendation to ensure a customized non-police crisis response program for Berkeley.
2. Selecting a Provider: The Steering Committee reviewed and provided feedback for the Request for Proposals that was released to community providers. Additionally, multiple members from the Steering Committee served on the review panel, eventually selecting Bonita House as the provider.
3. Ramp-Up Implementation: Once Bonita House was selected as the SCU provider, the Steering Committee provided feedback to operational procedures regarding how the SCU operates in the field to support clients as well as coordinate with other first responders. Additionally, the Steering Committee has shared personal experiences with the SCU in the field, including praise for how services are provided, and suggestions for improvement.

Now that the SCU is fully functional and embarking on the evaluation process, HHCS will prioritize expanding community input by working with pre-existing Commissions and meetings to provide updates about the SCU's progress as well as gather feedback about the program. This will include monthly updates to the Mental Health Commission and participation in Reimagining Public Safety updates every six months. Additionally, HHCS will continue to utilize the SCU community update email list to send out important program updates and advertise any related community events. By utilizing these forums, more information will be more accessible to a diverse set of community

members who are interested in learning more about the SCU and its progress. The Steering Committee has provided significant feedback and direction to this process, and many members will continue to do so through their representation within these public spaces.

Attachment:

1. Specialized Care Unit Brochure

cc: Tasha Tervalon, Acting Deputy City Manager
Anne Cardwell, Deputy City Manager
Scott Gilman, Director, HHCS
Tanya Bustamante, Interim Deputy Director, HHCS
Jeff Buell, Division Manager, Berkeley Mental Health, HHCS
Carianna Arredondo, Assistant to the City Manager
Matthai Chakko, Communications Director/Assistant to the City Manager
Mark Numainville, City Clerk
Jenny Wong, City Auditor
Farimah Brown, City Attorney

QUICK FACTS

What is the SCU?

- The Specialized Care Unit is a 3-person team including: a clinician, peer specialist, and EMT.
- The SCU responds to non-violent crisis calls without involving law enforcement.
- Available to anyone in Berkeley!

When should I call the SCU?

- If someone is experiencing a mental health or substance use related crises, such as:
 - Unable to calm down (anxiety)
 - Thoughts of self harm
 - Substance use concerns

The SCU operates everyday

- Sunday - Tuesday 24 hrs
- Wednesday - Saturday: 12am - 4pm & 8pm-11:59pm

Call (510) 948-0075 if you, or someone you know, is experiencing a crisis.

The SCU can respond to adults and minors in any part of Berkeley.

- Crises can happen anywhere, anytime. The SCU is able to respond within the comfort of your home, out in the community, or even on the streets.



CALL THE SCU IN THE EVENT OF A CRISIS:

Phone : (510) 948-0075



HOURS OF OPERATION: The SCU Operates Daily

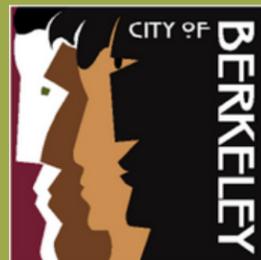
**Sunday, Monday & Tuesday:
24 hours a day**

**Wednesday, Thursday, Friday & Saturday:
12:00am-4:00pm and 8:00pm-11:59pm**



Scan the QR Code for more information about this service or visit this link:
bit.ly/BerkSCU

Questions about the SCU?
Send an email to
HHCS@berkeleyca.gov

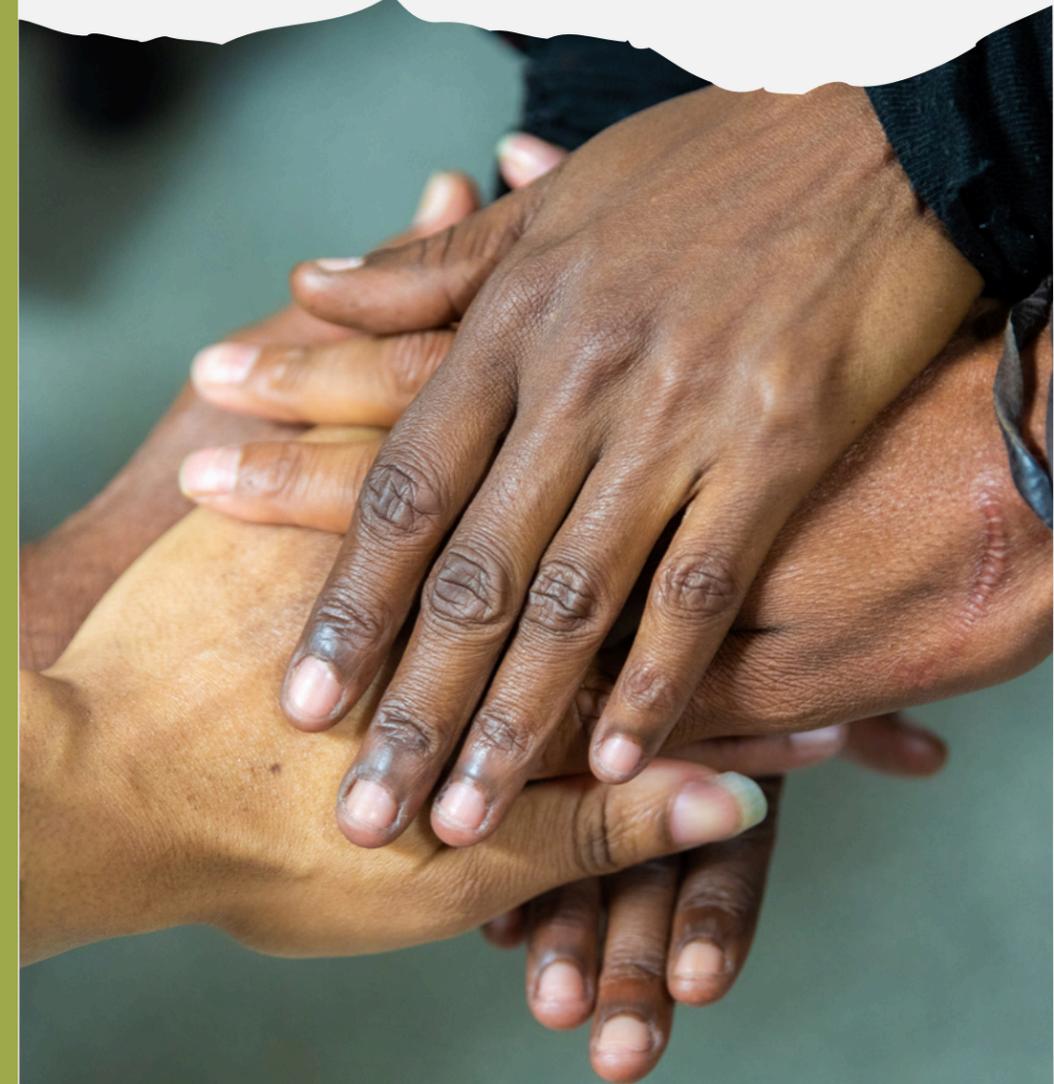


Health, Housing and
Community Services



Bonita House

Berkeley Launches SPECIALIZED CARE UNIT (SCU)





HOW DID THE SCU START?

In response to the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in May 2020 and the ensuing protests across the nation, a conversation emerged about how public safety can be done differently. As part of the City of Berkeley's broader initiative of Re-Imagining Public Safety, the City developed a vision for a 24/7 crisis response without police involvement to support people experiencing a non-violent crisis.

To create a program to meet Berkeley's needs, the City of Berkeley conducted extensive community outreach, analyzed over 30 crisis response programs, and established the SCU Steering Committee, which includes community members and city staff.

A FIRST FOR BERKELEY!

The SCU is Berkeley's first independent crisis response team that does not include police! This care-based team will use trained expertise to help community members experiencing a crisis.

If there is an immediate danger or notification of someone being hurt or severely injured, the SCU will notify 911.



SCU SERVICES

Are you or someone you know experiencing a crisis or in distress?

Symptoms may include:

- Unable to calm down
- Anger
- Depression or feelings of helplessness
- Confusion
- Thoughts of self-harm
- Delusions or illogical thinking
- Mood changes
- Social withdrawal
- Substance use related concerns

Services provided may include:

- De-escalation
- Water, or other wellness supplies
- Referrals to community services

Examples/behaviors of above signs and symptoms of a mental health or substance use related crisis can (and sometimes do) mimic a medical emergency. The SCU call taker will ask questions regarding medical history and behavioral health history to better understand the call.



HOW DO BERKELEY COMMUNITY MEMBERS ACCESS SCU SERVICES?

Community members who are experiencing or witnessing a crisis can call **(510) 948-0075** to request SCU services. Community members will be asked general questions about themselves and the crisis such as:

- Caller name and/or name of client (if known)
- Callback number or phone number
- Location and general description of the person experiencing the crisis
- Information about the crisis

Providing this information will help the SCU call back if the caller gets disconnected, and get a clear understanding of the crisis before meeting the client.

