



Office of Inspector General County of Los Angeles

FIRST SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT BACK ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

July 2021

Introduction

In July 2019, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) established the Family Assistance Program (FAP) aimed at improving compassionate communication and providing trauma-informed support to families of those whose lives were lost while in custody or following an encounter with Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) personnel. The Board instructed the Office of Inspector General to report back quarterly in the first year and semi-annually thereafter on the progress of the program. This is the Office of Inspector General's first semi-annual report.

Family Assistance Program Funding

As previously reported, a total of \$180,000 was initially allocated during the first year of the Family Assistance Program (FAP) for disbursement to families to cover burial expenses of up to \$7,500 per incident. The Department of Mental Health (DMH) reports during FY 2019-20, a total of \$29,014 was spent. Due to additional families that had not yet applied for reimbursement (but were anticipated to), the DMH requested a carryover of the remaining fund balance of \$150,986. As of June 22, 2021, the DMH reports it has spent \$130,619 in FY 2020-21. The remaining fund balance of \$20,367 is slated to be allocated to approximately four families pending reimbursement.

As of June 22, 2021, 24 families have received funds for burial services: four families received the funds in FY 2019-20 and 20 families received funds in FY 2020-21.

The DMH reports between July 1, 2020, and June 30, 2021, 31 in-custody deaths and six fatal deputy-involved shooting deaths occurred. Sixty percent of families (22 out of 37) were open to receiving services and assistance from DMH's Family Assistant Advocates. The remaining families either declined services, next-of-kin were not located, or there was no next-of-kin to contact.

Currently, the DMH continues to be the lead administrator of the program. As part of the Family Assistance Program, the DMH has been present after deputy-involved shootings to communicate with the families and during next-of-kin notifications. In addition, DMH provides crisis intervention and grief counseling while serving as a liaison to the LASD and other county partners. The DMH reports they will provide these services even when the funding for burial costs have been depleted.

The Chief Executive Office (CEO) has reported that the unforeseen financial impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) will eliminate program funding until an economic recovery identifies a viable funding source. While other funding options were explored, no new funding was identified to continue the program on an on-going basis. The CEO has advised the Office of Inspector General that no funding for FAP has been allocated for FY 2021-22. Furthermore, the CEO reports that if DMH or Department of Public Health (DPH) seeks funding for FAP, they must submit a supplemental budget proposal by July 15, 2021, that should contemplate the need for funding administration of the program, operations and support to families.

Finally, Senate Bill 299 – Victim compensation: use of force by law enforcement officer, may be a viable option for FAP funding, should the legislation pass. On July 5, 2021, the bill was read a second time and has been re-referred to the Committee on Appropriations. The bill allows eligibility for compensation under the California Victim Compensation Program (CalVCP) for serious bodily injury or death caused by a law enforcement officer's use of force. CalVCP reimburses eligible victims for many crime-related expenses, such as counseling and medical fees. This bill seeks to expand the definition of victims to include a victim's family members who have suffered due to the trauma of losing a loved one.

Establishing Family Assistance Program within Office of Violence Prevention

On November 15, 2020, the DPH reported to the Board on recommendations to improve and sustain the FAP. The DPH and DMH agreed with Office of Inspector General's recommendation that DPH's Office of Violence Prevention (OVP) should be funded to serve as the lead agency for the FAP, working collaboratively with DMH and partners to implement services, and outlined recommendations to move this forward. On January 27, 2021, the DPH provided a report to the Board outlining an implementation and funding plan for the OVP Early Implementation Strategic Plan. On June 2, 2021, the DPH provided a memorandum to the Board in response to a February 9, 2021, motion instructing DPH to develop a Crisis Response and Trauma Informed System of Care. In each of these reports, the DPH has outlined the steps and funding required to establish FAP within OVP as part of a Crisis Response Violence Intervention model that provides coordinated, healing informed response to community members following a violent incident. Crisis response is one of six priorities of the OVP Strategic Plan.

The DPH's June 2, 2021, memorandum also included a plan for expanding the Trauma Prevention Initiative (TPI) countywide. Phased expansion of TPI would include enhancing TPI support within four South Los Angeles communities in District 2 (Westmount West Athens, Willowbrook, Florence Firestone and unincorporated Compton), and expanding to three communities in District 1 as well as one other community with high rates of violence.

Aligning Trauma Prevention Initiative Strategies with Family Assistance Program

The Trauma Prevention Initiative aims to reduce violence related injuries and deaths by using survivor centered, community driven, and peer approaches to break the cycle of violence in hospital and community settings. DPH will align these intervention strategies and leverage TPI resources to support Crisis Response including FAP to respond to deputy-involved homicides and shootings.

The Trauma Prevention Initiative's Street Outreach agencies have already responded to several deputy-involved shootings. Community Intervention Workers and Ambassadors provide peace maintenance, rumor control, and conflict resolution among gang neighborhoods, provide safe passages across gang lines for community members to schools and parks, and provide informal mentoring and community programs. They also respond to violent incidents in the field. From January through June of 2021, Street Outreach agencies have responded to a total of 112 violent incidents, including 23 homicides. This is nearly the same number of incidents as they responded to during the entire year of 2020 (119 incidents including 29 homicides), aligning with increasing trends in violence countywide. TPI has established a protocol with the Sheriff's Department where stations notify Street Outreach agencies of an incident so that they can respond to promote peace, reduce likelihood of retaliatory violence, and connect victim's families to services.

Since January 2020, Street Outreach agencies have responded to seven deputy-involved shootings within the four South Los Angeles communities where TPI is implemented. Street Outreach workers responded to the crime scene and took action to control diffusion of rumors. As noted in the Office of Inspector General's October 2020 report to the Board on the Long-Term Viability of FAP, TPI Street Outreach workers responded to a high-profile deputy-involved shooting in Westmont, the shooting of Dijon Kizzee, and provided support to calm the scene, connect the family to resources, and promote peace during community protests. For the deputy-involved shooting of Fred Williams in Willowbrook in 2020, TPI Street Outreach workers connected the victim's family to services and provided safe passages during community protests.

The infrastructure built by TPI can readily be expanded to support FAP by connecting a network of Community Intervention Workers with lived experience and community trust to assist with grieving families. While Street Outreach agencies are already filling this role in the course of their work, additional resources are needed to fully address the ongoing violence in these communities and mitigate the rapidly increasing violence that has been exacerbated by the

COVID-19 pandemic. The currently proposed funding for Crisis Response/FAP and TPI expansion will provide resources to enable agencies to support FAP, which will require additional Ambassadors to ensure credible connections to the various neighborhoods, and case management support for families. Annual evaluation of outcomes and impact will help to guide future program and budget recommendations.

The Office of Inspector General will continue to monitor and report on all aspects of the Family Assistance Program semi-annually.