



# Police Officer Perspectives on Police-Assisted Diversion (PAD) in Philadelphia

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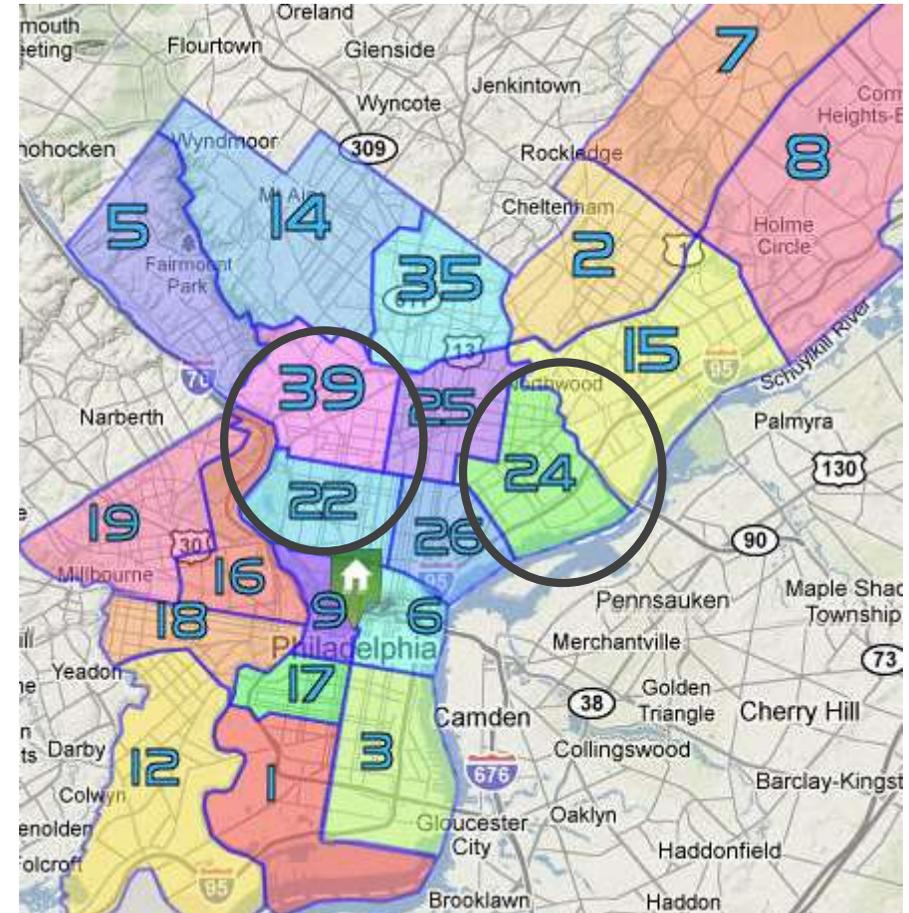
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# A Little About PAD in Philadelphia

- History:
  - Began in 22<sup>nd</sup>/39<sup>th</sup> PSAs in 2018; subsequent expansion to 24<sup>th</sup> PSA and “City Wide Vice”
- Programmatic details
  - Stop-referrals: pre-booking for drug possession, retail theft, prostitution
  - Social-referrals: for those requesting or proactively offered help
- Co-responder model
  - Embeds behavioral health professionals with officers during limited time slots in 24<sup>th</sup> PSA



# A Little About PAD in Philadelphia

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- General sense of the numbers
  - 500+ total referrals
  - 2/3 of people eligible in potential referral interactions
  - PAD-North (22<sup>nd</sup> & 39<sup>th</sup>): 50% stop; 50% social
  - PAD-East (24<sup>th</sup>): 20% stop; 80% social
  
- Co-Responders in PAD-East have engaged 800+ people in the community.

# Methods

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- Semi-structured interviews with 15 officers
- Focused on understanding perceptions and experiences with PAD
- Thematic analysis of transcripts

# Themes

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General perceptions of  
PAD value

Readiness to change

Innovating on the fly

Alignment with  
policing philosophy

Practical challenges

Dis/trust between  
officers and clients

Beneficial features of  
the program

Concerns

Dis/trust between  
partners

Sense of agency and  
role

Lack of leverage

Context dependence

# Readiness to Change

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- As heuristic for the limits of coercion and expectation-setting

“I think I've helped pretty much a handful of people that I can possibly help, and all the rest of them were not ready yet.”

“I can talk to someone for three weeks straight, try to get them help, and they say, "No, no, no, no." And then I ask them the next day, and they're ready to go.”

“I think if the person is truly ready to get help and receive help, this program is very beneficial.”

- As a way to understand potential PAD advantages cf. court programs

“We see people in crisis. Sometimes they are ready to make a change today. [Usually,] you get arrested, you get a court date, you might not get in front of a judge or a program for weeks or months. You are back in the community. You've moved on – you are not ready anymore. ”

“So, you're looking at three or four court dates right off the bat before you even get near a program. Now maybe they're not as ready to change anymore, back in the community, they moved on”

# Practical challenges

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- Logistical difficulty of making referrals given time restraints

“Districts want all cops to utilize PAD. But it's very hard to try to help somebody and get them connected because you're going from call to call to call.”

“[I]n a district like this, where it's violent and there's shootings all the time, you don't have time to always sit down there and work through people's problems. I think we should, but it's hard..”

- Restrictive eligibility criteria

“And so what I've noticed . . . is that these repeat offenders are not qualifying, and we're dealing with the community, and an area that you're going to have either repeat offenders”

“[I]t's heartbreaking when you get the call and say, “. . . [t]hey have a warrant." But they genuinely wanted this help. It sucks.”

“I understand there has to be some criteria regarding people who are getting enrolled into the program, but at the same time you're missing a large population of people who could benefit. . .”

# Concerns

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- Inadequate back-end resources (especially SDoH)

“You can give people their treatment . . . but now they've got to work, they need a place to live. . . When you say providing services, that's got to be a full spectrum of things”

“They need jobs. They need housing.”

“[We need more service providers]. What we hear is that when they get there they have to sit around and wait. . . They tell us 7 o'clock, “I want to do this,” but if they have to wait until 11 o'clock they might not want to do it anymore.”

- Inadequate support from outside the PAD programming

“We need more from the civilian end. Like we need boots on the ground. . . Law enforcement in America is not set up for addiction. We don't have the resources . . . I am not a counselor. I'm not a social worker. We are here to enforce the laws. We are here to help people. We have an obligation to preserve life, but we shouldn't be in this end of it. . . We shouldn't be the ones out there . . . I've been asking since I got here: where is everybody? Cause I keep hearing there are [other services providers]. Where are they?”

# Concerns

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- Difficulty sustaining the program if the community does not benefit

“[A] lot of those residents are, they're pleading for a lot of help out there, and I think the diversion is a great way of trying to get these people to help. . . . But if we don't deliver on that and the person goes in and out and just uses it as an opportunity to evade arrest, you're going to lose the community buy-in, faith in the police, faith in the PAD program, and faith in the providers.”

- Difficulty recognizing PAD referrals in officer work

“Officers are not getting credit for their arrest. . . . You want to be validated as an officer. . . . Commendations and transfer points [are important] ”

# Lack of leverage

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- Problematic as a “free pass”

“But my major concern is that I don't want people thinking that they can do things and not go to jail. . . I don't want that happening. But how can we avoid that? I don't think we can.”

“I feel like we have decriminalized things. Like if a person doesn't follow up with the program they got a freebie. I understand what they are trying to do. Cause the person doing these low level crimes, are they a criminal? Probably not - they are stealing shampoo. But what message are we sending. ”

- Realistic practically given that many crimes will not be prosecuted

“Retail thefts aren't even being charged through the DA's office. Like a low level \$10 bottle of shampoo . . . [they are] not wasting prosecution on it.”

“At least they have access to something.”

“Them knowing that the ultimate consequence is not us taking them to jail makes it a lot easier on us because it's less likely that they're going to fight to resist talking to us or anything like that.”

# Next steps

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- Complete thematic analyses of client and officer interviews
- Conduct a quantitative analyses

# Acknowledgements

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- Funding from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD)
- Police officers and PAD personnel

# Thanks!

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# Concerns

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- Inadequate data-sharing

“I think we do a great job in the city of really letting the public know the results of a program, but not internally in showing our people, this is the job, what we asked you to do, this is the results of it, this is how it's working. I think that in order to keep that buy-in we have to show that, highlight those cases. And even offer rewards to these officers that do a lot of our social referrals.”

- Distrust

“I just think that they don't trust what we say. I think they're real skeptical about the program in the beginning. Probably thinking that it's a kind of trap, you know?”

Yeah. I'd rather do that. I rather see someone who gets some help, and then have two people walk out.