

# Diversion First

## Calendar Year 2025 Equity Impact Plan



**Leadership Sponsor:** Lisa Potter

**Lead(s):** Lisa Potter/Diversion First Partners

**Brief Description of the Initiative:** Diversion First offers alternatives to incarceration for people with mental illness, substance use disorders and/or developmental disabilities, who come into contact with the criminal justice system, mostly for low level offenses. This countywide initiative provides a continuum of services and programs designed to meet the needs of this population at various intervention points, with the goal of providing assessment, treatment and needed supports. Diversion First is designed to prevent repeat encounters with the criminal justice system, improve public safety and promote a healthier community. This effort involves strong collaboration across multiple agencies, including health and human services, public safety and the courts.

The County uses the nationally recognized Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) as a framework to inform community-based strategies related to the involvement of people with mental illness and substance use disorders in the criminal justice system and identifies how this population flows through the criminal justice system along distinct intercept points, each with possibilities for intervention. This model has guided the development and implementation of Diversion First services since inception.

Since Diversion First launched, over 4,200 individuals have been diverted from potential arrest. Over the past several years, over 80% of individuals who were involved with law enforcement at the Merrifield Crisis Response Center (MCRC) did not have a repeat visit related to criminal justice the following year, and 80% did not have a repeat visit OR a jail booking within a year.

**Context:**

Those served through Diversion First are historically marginalized populations, including people with mental illness, substance use disorders and/or developmental disabilities, and people with a history of justice involvement. Individuals in these populations often have disparate access to quality behavioral health services, and disproportionate representation in the justice system.

Behavioral Health Equity is the right to access quality health care for all populations regardless of the individual's race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or geographical location. This includes access to prevention, treatment, and

recovery services for mental health and substance use disorders (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Jun 10, 2021). Many people who need behavioral health care are not aware of services or how to access them, and/or may not access services due to stigma. Increased awareness and community engagement are needed to reduce stigma and increase access to care.

Historically, the justice system has been associated with barriers that inhibit behavioral health equity, including systemic racism, prior exposure to the criminal justice system, and sometimes inadequate criminal justice programming. Additionally, incarceration can worsen mental health, highlighting the need to prevent individuals with severe mental illness from being incarcerated whenever possible, and to connect individuals who were formerly incarcerated to behavioral health care to avoid future justice involvement.

While the percentage of individuals with behavioral health issues who are incarcerated varies, Fairfax County saw a 21% decrease in the jail behavioral health population with a misdemeanor as their most serious charge from 2015 to 2023. Additionally, in the same timeframe, there was an 84% increase in the number of those who were referred to Community Service Board jail-based services, increasing access to care.

It is often challenging to gather and analyze cross-system data. To provide the most effective and efficient services along the diversion continuum, it is vital to have a clear understanding of populations accessing services, disparities and any gaps in programming and outcomes.

It should be noted that County Diversion First partners each have their own agency Equity Impact Plans. Many of these plans have action steps that include recruitment and retention strategies for a diverse workforce, as well as equity training for agency staff. This plan focuses on cross-system actions and opportunities to establish or enhance multi-agency efforts.

**Key Stakeholders:**

Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board

Fairfax County Police Department

Sheriff's Office

Fire and Rescue Department

Dept. of Public Safety Communications

Court Services

General District Court

Circuit Court

Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court

Public Defenders Office

Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney

Office of the County Attorney

Department of Information Technology

Office of Public Affairs

Department of Housing and Community Development

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| <b>Goal 1: Enhance efforts to collect, review and analyze Diversion First cross-system data</b>  |   |  |          |   |
|--|---|--|----------|---|
| <b>Key Equity Driver(s):</b> Community Health and Wellbeing, Community Safety and Justice  |   |  |          |   |
| <b>One Fairfax Area(s) of Focus:</b>   |   |  |          |   |
| 6. Community and public safety that includes services such as fire, emergency medical services, police, health, emergency management and code enforcement that are responsive to all residents so that everyone feels safe to live, work, learn, and play in any neighborhood of Fairfax County. |   |  |          |   |
| 7. A criminal justice system that provides equitable access and fair treatment for all people.   |   |  |          |   |
| 10. A health and human services system where opportunities exist for all individuals and families to be safe, be healthy and realize their potential through the provision of accessible, high quality, affordable and culturally appropriate services.  |   |  |          |   |
| <b>Countywide Strategic Plan Community Outcome Area(s):</b> Empowerment and Support for Residents Facing Vulnerability (ESFRV); Safety and Security (SS)   |   |  |          |   |
| <b>Countywide Strategic Plan Strategies/Metric(s):</b>   |   |  |          |   |
| ESRFV 4. Use all available sources of data to identify and understand emerging and existing vulnerabilities, in order to proactively engage impacted residents, identify service gaps and efficiently allocate resources.  |   |  |          |   |
| ESRFV 6. Implement a standardized, coordinated approach to data collection and sharing among county agencies and contracted service providers that incorporates best practices for data governance.  |   |  |          |   |
| SS 5. Bolster programs and resources that reduce recidivism and support successful offender re-entry into the community.   |   |  |          |   |
| Actions  | Stakeholders  | Responsible  | Timeline | Performance Measures  |
| 1a. Utilize cross-system data to analyze equity in achieving program-level goals   | Fairfax-Falls Church<br>Community Services Board,<br>Fairfax County Police Dept,<br>Sheriff's Office, Dept. Public<br>Safety Communications, Fire<br>and Rescue, Courts | Diversion First<br>Data and<br>Evaluation<br>Manager | CY 2025  | Data disaggregated<br>and analyzed; # of<br>program reports<br>analyzed                           |
| 1b. Convene program level groups to review data, identify areas for improvement, and develop additional metrics to demonstrate program outcomes  | Fairfax-Falls Church<br>Community Services Board,<br>Fairfax County Police Dept,<br>Sheriff's Office, Dept. Public  | Data Quality and<br>Outcomes Group                   | CY 2025  | # of groups<br>convened; identified<br>areas that need<br>attention; plans to<br>address concerns |

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|   | Safety Communications, Fire and Rescue, Courts           |   |         |  |
| 1c. Expand ability to access Diversion First data through specific state data systems   | Community Services Board, Courts, justice system         | Diversion First Data and Evaluation Manager | CY 2025 | Staff gain access to state database(s); staff generate reports to report data from state platforms |
| 1d. Complete data quality assessment of Diversion First data warehouse and business intelligence dashboards, enhancing the ability to collect and analyze key cross-system measures | Diversion First Partners Dept. of Information Technology | Diversion First Data and Evaluation Manager | CY 2025 | Data warehouse is launched; data is shared among stakeholders                                      |

**Goal 2: Promote equity and equitable access across the continuum of Diversion First services**

**Key Equity Driver(s):** Community Health and Wellbeing, Community Safety and Justice

**One Fairfax Area(s) of Focus:**

6. Community and public safety that includes services such as fire, emergency medical services, police, health, emergency management and code enforcement that are responsive to all residents so that everyone feels safe to live, work, learn, and play in any neighborhood of Fairfax County.

7. A criminal justice system that provides equitable access and fair treatment for all people.

10. A health and human services system where opportunities exist for all individuals and families to be safe, be healthy and realize their potential through the provision of accessible, high quality, affordable and culturally appropriate services.

**Countywide Strategic Plan Community Outcome Area(s):** Empowerment and Support for Residents Facing Vulnerability (ESRFV); Safety and Security (SS)

**Countywide Strategic Plan Strategies/Metric(s):**

ESRFV 10. Build upon the existing framework and county agency cross-collaboration efforts in order to ensure a comprehensive system that connects residents facing vulnerability to the information and services they are seeking regardless of which organizational door they enter.

ESRFV 13. Evaluate existing service in comparison to industry best practices to ensure the most effective, people-centered approaches are utilized to meet the needs of residents facing vulnerability.

SS 5. Bolster programs and resources that reduce recidivism and support successful offender re-entry into the community.

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SS 14. Work collaboratively to increase access to services and identify alternatives to adjudication and incarceration (e.g., diversion programs, specialty dockets) while protecting victims’ and witnesses’ rights.

SS 15. Develop and implement recommendations to ensure that all community members are treated fairly and equitably in the enforcement of laws and their experiences with the adult and juvenile justice systems, whether they are defendants, victims of crime or witnesses.

| Actions  | Stakeholders  | Responsible                    | Timeline | Performance Measures  |
|--|---|--------------------------------|----------|---|
| 2a. Update the County’s Sequential Intercept Model map, outlining each of the available services and programs at each of the six intercept points        | Diversion First partner agencies                                  | Diversion Initiatives Director | CY 2025  | New Sequential Intercept Model map developed  |
| 2b. Identify gaps, barriers and disparities, enhance collaboration and determine whether resources and opportunities are available across diverse groups | Diversion First partner agencies                                  | Diversion Initiatives Director | CY 2025  | Gaps and barriers identified; new connections made between stakeholders   |
| 2c. Reinforce reentry/transition services through enhanced partnerships and coordinated services   | Diversion First partner agencies<br>Community Based Organizations | ADC Collaborators Group        | CY 2025  | Develop/enhance business practices and protocols that ensure cross-system connections and linkages to community-based resources |

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| Goal 3: Develop and enhance partnerships that will strengthen behavioral health and diversion services and advance equity  |                          |             |          |   |
|--|--------------------------|-------------|----------|---|
| <b>Key Equity Driver(s):</b> Community Health and Wellbeing, Community Safety and Justice  |                          |             |          |   |
| <b>One Fairfax Area(s) of Focus:</b>   |                          |             |          |   |
| 6. Community and public safety that includes services such as fire, emergency medical services, police, health, emergency management and code enforcement that are responsive to all residents so that everyone feels safe to live, work, learn, and play in any neighborhood of Fairfax County. |                          |             |          |   |
| 7. A criminal justice system that provides equitable access and fair treatment for all people.   |                          |             |          |   |
| 10. A health and human services system where opportunities exist for all individuals and families to be safe, be healthy and realize their potential through the provision of accessible, high quality, affordable and culturally appropriate services.  |                          |             |          |   |
| <b>Countywide Strategic Plan Community Outcome Area(s):</b> Empowerment and Support for Residents Facing Vulnerability (ESRFV); Safety and Security (SS)   |                          |             |          |   |
| <b>Countywide Strategic Plan Strategies/Metric(s):</b>   |                          |             |          |   |
| ESRFV 2. Foster a county workforce culture that emphasizes a person-centered, integrated and comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of residents facing vulnerability.  |                          |             |          |   |
| ESRFV 10. Build upon the existing framework and county agency cross-collaboration efforts in order to ensure a comprehensive system that connects residents facing vulnerability to the information and services they are seeking regardless of which organizational door they enter.            |                          |             |          |   |
| ESRFV 12. Close critical service gaps by coordinating county safety-net efforts with state, regional and community-based partners to ensure that services are integrated, efficient and non-duplicative.   |                          |             |          |   |
| ESRFV 13. Evaluate existing service in comparison to industry best practices to ensure the most effective, people-centered approaches are utilized to meet the needs of residents facing vulnerability.  |                          |             |          |   |
| SS 14. Work collaboratively to increase access to services and identify alternatives to adjudication and incarceration (e.g., diversion programs, specialty dockets) while protecting victims' and witnesses' rights.  |                          |             |          |   |
| SS 15. Develop and implement recommendations to ensure that all community members are treated fairly and equitably in the enforcement of laws and their experiences with the adult and juvenile justice systems, whether they are defendants, victims of crime or witnesses.                     |                          |             |          |   |
| Actions  | Stakeholders             | Responsible | Timeline | Performance Measures  |
| 3a. Develop and/or bolster relationships with community-based organizations to expand services available to Diversion First population and their families  | Diversion First Partners |             | CY 2025  | # of new opportunities for collaboration and connections to resources |

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| 3b. Join a new cohort of national Stepping Up Innovators, creating increased peer connections and access to resources and best/evidence-based practices                     | Diversion First Partners<br>National Stepping Up Innovator Counties | Diversion Initiatives Director | CY 2025 | Attendance at Stepping Up cohort meetings/events; 1:1 peer connections with at least two other jurisdictions |
| 3c. Develop an onboarding/orientation guide, to include resources on stigma and equity, for staff who are new to Diversion First efforts to create long-term sustainability | Diversion First Partners  | Diversion Initiatives Director | CY 2025 | Guide developed and shared with new staff  |