

**Key Common Themes:  
Toronto Police Service – Audit of 9-1-1  
Operations &  
Review of Opportunities to Support More  
Effective Responses to Calls for Service**

**June 14, 2022**

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Auditor General

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## Background

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### **TPSB invited the Auditor General to conduct an overall risk assessment and perform audits of TPS**

The Toronto Police Services Board (TPSB) Chair's letter dated December 12, 2019, stated that "*on behalf of the Toronto Police Services Board, I invite you to conduct an overall risk assessment as well as a cyber security audit of the Toronto Police Service*".

Beginning in the spring of 2020, there were high-profile events and protests in the United States and Canada related to policing and the community safety response for marginalized individuals and communities. With these events came public pressure to transform policing services and to review police funding.

City Council recommendations made at its June 29, 2020 meeting and recommendations made by the TPSB at its August 18, 2020 meeting both reinforced the support for the Auditor General's audits of the Toronto Police Service (TPS). Various recommendations in both the Council and Board reports requested the Auditor General to develop an independent audit work plan in order to identify opportunities to more effectively and efficiently deliver police services in the City of Toronto.

### **TPSB approved Auditor General's risk-based audit plan**

In November 2020, the TPSB approved the Auditor General's overall risk assessment and risk-based audit plan. This plan was independently developed by the Auditor General and sets the audit priorities at TPS over the next five years.

### **Two related Auditor General reports of TPS**

In January 2021, the Auditor General's Office commenced work on two projects of TPS (one audit and one non-audit), the results of which are reflected in the following reports:

- 1. Toronto Police Service - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations**  
***Better Support for Staff, Improved Information Management and Outcomes***

Link to report: [Auditor General Toronto Reports](#)

- 2. Review of Toronto Police Service - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service**  
***A Journey of Change: Improving Community Safety and Well-Being Outcomes***

Link to report: [Auditor General Toronto Reports](#)

These projects have common themes and messages and are the first in a series of audits set out in the Auditor General’s risk-based audit plan. They also represent the first time in about 10 years that the Auditor General’s Office has conducted audits of TPS.

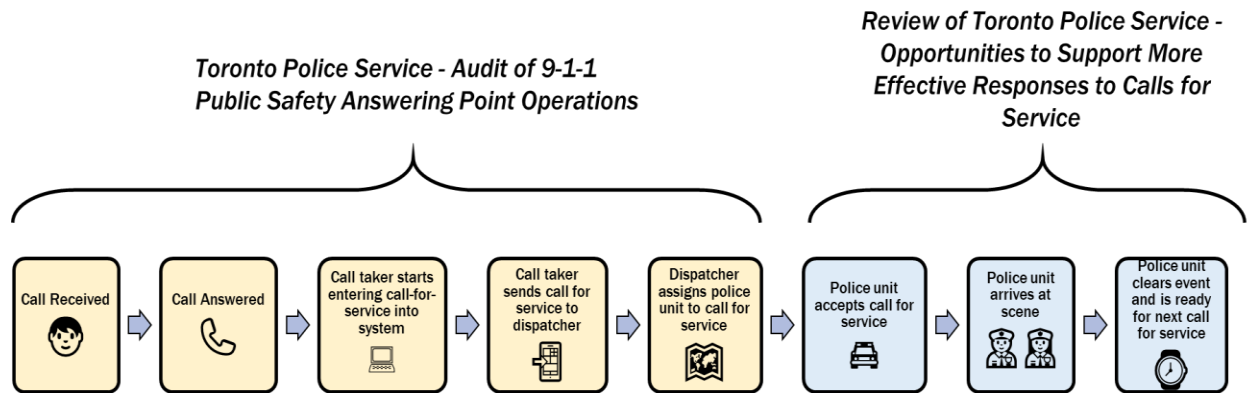
**Scope of Two Projects - From Call to Response**

**Our projects span the continuum of front-line policing**

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, our two projects span the continuum of front-line policing:

- from the time when a member of the public calls 9-1-1 or the TPS non-emergency line and police resources are dispatched, as covered in *Toronto Police Service (TPS) - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations*
- to when Priority Response Unit (PRU) police officers, or other officers accept the event and arrive on scene to address calls for service, as covered in *Review of Toronto Police Service (TPS) - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service*

**Figure 1: Continuum of Front-Line Policing and Our Two Reports**

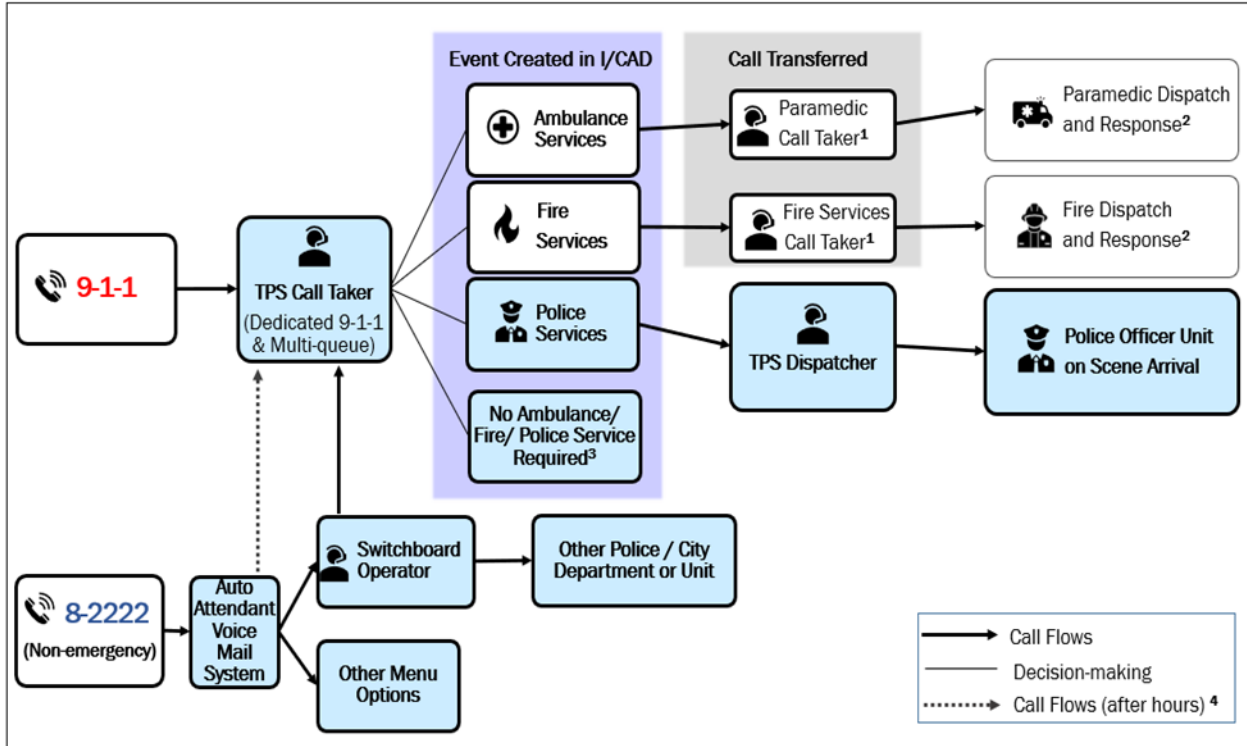


**TPS Communications Services and the PRU are integrated and impacted by the same factors**

While both projects focus on distinct areas along this continuum, they are integrated and affected by a common set of operational variables. The 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) operates on a demand-based model and drives the first level of front-line police resourcing. The call flow process is illustrated in Figure 2 below and the blue shaded boxes are under TPS’s responsibilities. In turn, PRU officers rely to a great extent on call centre communications operators, who help to allocate front-line resources to address calls for service in their divisions, and relay important information.

For example, an influx of incoming calls on a particular day or time of day puts strain on both communications operators answering, processing, and dispatching the incoming calls, and PRU officers responding to the resulting calls for service.

**Figure 2: Call Flow Process for a Call for Service to the Call Centre through the Emergency 9-1-1 Line or the Dedicated Non-emergency Line (416-808-2222)**



<sup>1</sup> The call takers remain on the line after the call is answered by the paramedic and/or fire services call takers to determine if police are also required for the call or not

<sup>2</sup> Not in the scope of this audit

<sup>3</sup> Some of these calls could be diverted to other agencies (e.g. 3-1-1 for information on City services) or community-based alternative responders (e.g. 2-1-1 as part of the Toronto Community Crisis Service pilot project) or passed on to the crisis worker who is recently co-located in the call centre as part of TPS's pilot with the Gerstein centre.

<sup>4</sup> During operating hours (Monday to Friday from 7 am to 10:45 pm), the switchboard operator answers the call when the caller presses "0" using the auto attendant system. The switchboard operator may transfer the call to a call taker by routing it to the emergency queue or non-emergency queue, depending on the assistance required. When callers press "0" outside of these hours, the call will be routed directly to the TPS call takers.

**TPS should consider these reports holistically**

As a result of these linkages, it will be important for the TPSB and TPS, as well as the City, to consider the findings, recommendations, and key common themes from these reports holistically in order to fully realize possible synergies and the most efficient and effective outcomes possible.

## **Purpose of this Overall Common Themes Report**

**This overall common themes report highlights key common messages and themes of the 2 reports**

The purpose of this overall common themes report is to highlight key messages and themes common to both of these reports. These themes include a need to:

- 1. Improve and Use Data and Information Systems to Enhance Staffing and Operational Strategies, and Ensure Adequate Resources** are in place to address priority areas, including improved emergency response times and 9-1-1 call answering times
- 2. Further Explore Call for Service Alternative Responses** to free up time of Priority Response Unit (PRU) officers and 9-1-1 communications operators, and help provide better outcomes for people
- 3. Build Greater Community Education and Awareness** to help manage demand on the 9-1-1 line and expectations that a PRU officer response is primarily for emergencies and police matters
- 4. Enhance Response Time Methodology and Improve Emergency Response Times and 9-1-1 Call Answering Times** through the above three areas
- 5. Recognize that this is a Journey of Collaboration Between the City, TPS, and Other Stakeholders to Build Better Outcomes by Moving Forward Together.** There is no **quick fix**, and **careful consideration** of alternative non-police responses will be needed.

This report is intended to be read in conjunction with the other two reports mentioned above in order to better understand the full context of these key messages.

**Thank you**

We would like to thank the TPSB for inviting the Auditor General's Office in to conduct audits of TPS. We acknowledge the support and cooperation received from the TPSB and TPS in providing the data and information needed to conduct these projects. We would also like to thank the Toronto Police Association, the City Manager's Office, and City Divisions for their assistance.

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## Key Common Themes and Messages

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**1. Improve and Use Data to Enhance Staffing and Operational Strategies, and Ensure Adequate Resources are in Place to Address Priority Areas**

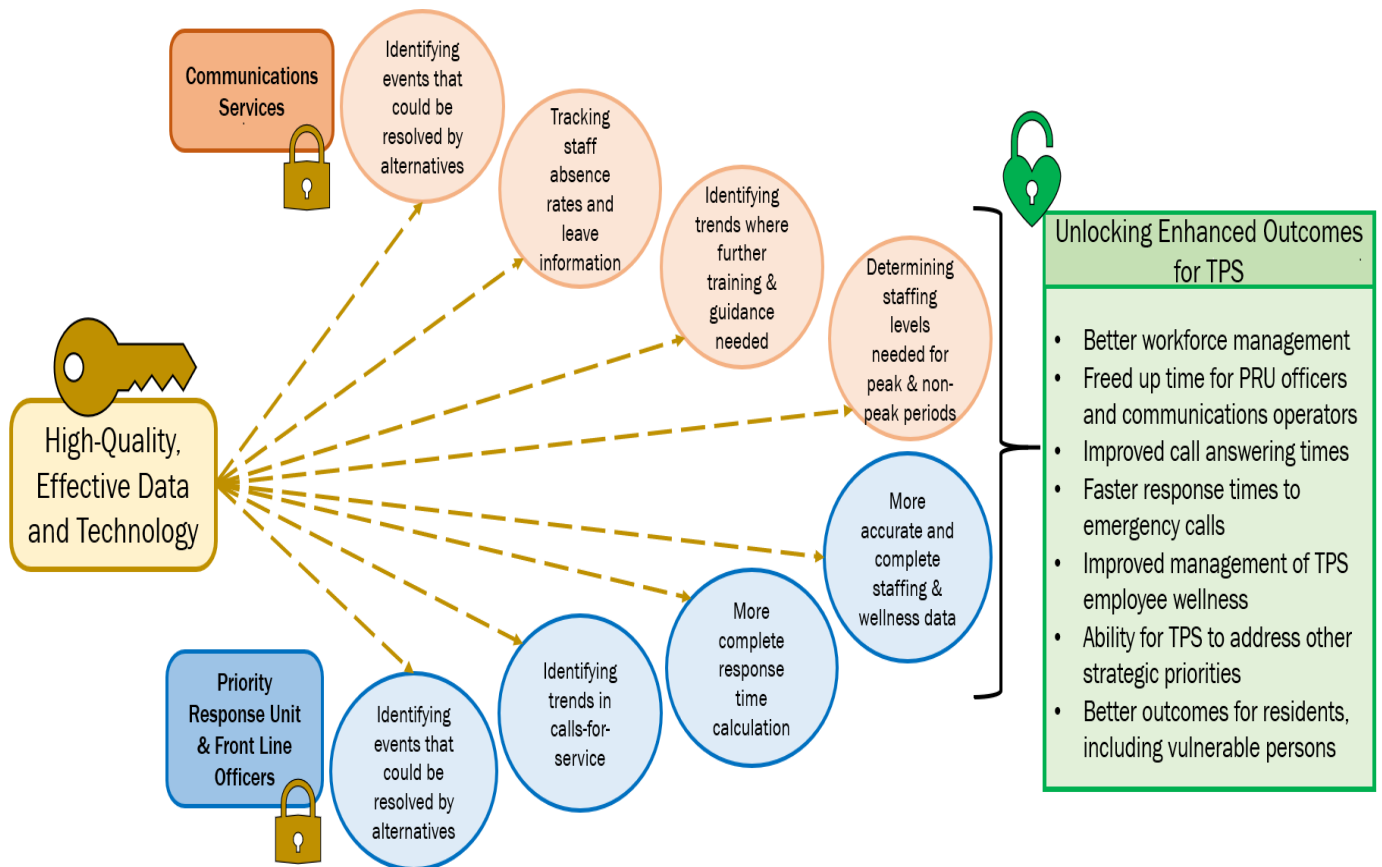
**Improving and enhancing data and technology is key to unlocking benefits**

The need for better data, analysis, and increased use of technology was a theme found throughout both projects and a common thread connecting many of the findings and recommendations, including the other themes in this report. As noted in Figure 3 below, improving data, information systems, and enhancing data and technology use will be the key to unlocking positive impacts across the front-line continuum. In *TPS - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations*, we outlined the investment needed in the 9-1-1 PSAP information systems that will benefit everyone.

**Shift towards a data-driven culture will be needed**

During our projects, TPS management and the TPSB acknowledged that improving and increasing the use of data will need to be an area of strategic focus for TPS and they are committed to change. Management and the Board should continue to pursue improvements in this area and explore the shift that may be needed for TPS to adopt a data-driven culture.

Figure 3: Unlocking Enhanced Outcomes for TPS Through Better Data



**We encountered data reliability and quality issues in both projects**

As described further below and as highlighted in both reports, we found serious challenges with staffing and operational data, including information in the call for service (I/CAD) system, operational performance data that we requested from the telecommunications service provider to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the call centre, and information systems for time tracking and disability/accommodation.

**There is a need for TPS to review its staffing strategies and address challenges**

We also noted a need for TPS to review its staffing strategies and address challenges with staffing levels along the front-line policing continuum, which can be better informed with improved and increased data. Staffing challenges can impact the capacity to answer calls, particularly during peak periods, and can result in call answering delays. Staffing challenges can also delay the emergency response by PRU officers.

We believe that data improvements and increased analysis will be fundamental to enhancing TPS's operational model, as well as to a successful journey of moving forward to have sustainable, long-lasting change.



**Funding and staffing strategies to achieve the changes will also need to be considered by TPS and the City**

TPS and the City will also need to consider and examine funding and staffing strategies that will be required to achieve these changes, including establishing non-police alternatives for calls for service, improving data, and ensuring adequate staffing. These investments should help achieve benefits and better longer-term outcomes for TPS, the City, and the people of Toronto.

### **Improve Data and Better Leverage Technology and Data**

**Improved data quality is needed**

TPS needs to improve its data quality and further use data and automation to help manage its workforce and inform decisions at the Communications Services unit, the PRU, and in other areas of the organization. Increased ability to analyze data will provide meaningful insights for more informed decision-making, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of TPS operations and will result in better outcomes for the people of Toronto.

Before using data, it needs to first be reliable, accurate, and detailed enough to allow for fulsome analysis. We found that the data that was available and related to phone calls, call for service, staffing, and operations was sometimes either inaccurate and/or not sufficient to allow for effective analysis. These limitations significantly impacted our ability to carry out some of our planned procedures and resulted in a scope limitation in our audit of the 9-1-1 PSAP operations.

Improving how data is captured will be critical in allowing TPS to conduct data analysis to make informed operational and staffing decisions and to strategically move forward as it works with the City to divert some non-emergency calls for assistance.

Data is also fundamental for working with the City to identify areas where alternative call response is needed (discussed in Theme 2 of this report) and identifying where certain processes may not fully be working as intended, such as 3-1-1 call diversion strategies currently in place.

**Data challenges limited our ability to analyze calls for service**

In *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service*, we noted that details of what transpired during a call for service cannot always be reliably or easily obtained without reviewing various sources of documentation, such as listening to calls, or reviewing police reports. Further, there was no easy way to identify calls for service involving persons experiencing homelessness and mental health issues outside of certain designated event types. We also noted issues with staffing/resourcing data.

In reviewing calls for service, a lack of detailed data fields in the call for service system limited our ability to filter and analyze the entire population of calls for service for the event types we wanted to explore further. Being able to draw trends and understand call for service data will be an important tool for TPS and the City in proactively developing strategies for potential alternative responses in the future.

Below we've included an example of a call for service we reviewed involving individuals who appeared to be experiencing homelessness. The only way we were able to identify this was by reviewing the caller audio and associated reports.

**More detailed data would assist with identifying potential alternative responses**

More detailed data would allow calls for service similar to this one to be more easily identified and potentially diverted to an alternative response that may help better address the root causes and provide community supports and free up PRU officer time. It is important to note that exploring and establishing alternative responses will take time to ensure that they are effective and available at the time needed.

**Example: Persons Possibly Experiencing Homelessness at Gas Station**

In a call for service we reviewed, a staff person at a gas station called police about two individuals who appeared to be experiencing homelessness and were panhandling in front of their business, holding the door open for customers. There were no signs of aggression or violence. PRU officers arrived and requested the individuals to leave.

**We experienced data challenges in obtaining data from the telecommunications service provider**

In *TPS - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations*, Exhibit 1 to the report highlighted the many challenges we experienced during the audit when we requested the call for service data and related information from the telecommunications service provider (e.g., call taker who answered the call, the number of call takers staffed at different time periods, the time spent on call and 'not ready' time).




For example, in attempting to analyze the time in which 9-1-1- calls were answered, we had to combine and analyze many manual spreadsheets that TPS saved (some were missing) and even then, could not use the information to calculate whether service level standards were achieved due to limitations in the data.

Other illustrative examples are included in Figure 4 below, however, a complete listing and analysis of these issues is included in each report.

**Better data is needed for TPS to effectively carry out strategic change**

Improving the quality of call for service and operational data may help identify calls suitable for alternative response and can in turn reduce demand and call-processing time at the call centre, and the time spent by PRU officers responding to lower priority non-emergency calls. It will also help Communications Services more effectively manage its workforce and help inform decision-making to improve the timeliness of call answering.

Figure 4: Examples of Data Issues and Opportunities for Technology and Automation

		
<p><b>TPS - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations</b></p>	<p><b>Both Projects</b></p>	<p><b>Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of data to perform effective, real time, workforce management that helps to ensure that peak and non-peak periods are better staffed, and 9-1-1 call answering times improved</li> <li>• Call and operational performance data are not being completely and accurately tracked and are not readily available</li> <li>• Manual spreadsheets used for monitoring operational performance is prone to human error</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of data to know officer availability when they do not report their “at-scene” status</li> <li>• Discrepancies with number of records in various database tables of the I/CAD system</li> <li>• Data reliability issues and enhancement opportunities with staff time tracking and disability / accommodation data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of detailed data necessary to perform effective analysis of call for service data and event types to allow TPS to identify trends in call for service data (e.g. calls for service involving people experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges) and to work proactively with the City to explore potential alternative responses for those events</li> </ul>

Importance of increasing Use of Data, Technology and Automation

**Increased use of data and technology will also help drive efficiencies**

In addition to improving data quality, increased use of data and technology will also help drive efficiencies at both the 9-1-1 PSAP and with PRU officers and provide insights for trend analysis and informed decision-making.

For example, using automated tools to collect information from callers and allowing two-way interaction with TPS without the need for a call-taker to call back and speak with the caller, may assist with more effective and efficient call response.

**Automating call for service information collection may assist with more effective and efficient response**

This could include the ability for a caller to upload details, including documents or photos, relevant to the call for service, provide updates on the situation they are facing, and to cancel a call for service if the situation no longer exists, without speaking to a call-taker.

Automated status update texts, including notifications for when officers are on the way, could also help reduce instances of callers calling TPS back or vice versa, for certain event types. These calls sometimes tie up the 9-1-1 emergency line when callers call back to ask when police will arrive.

These same tools to increase communication may also help avoid having PRU officers spend time attending calls where the situation has already been resolved or is found to be “gone-on-arrival”.

For example, callers could text that the noisy party has ended, or the unwanted guest has left, so that PRU officers would not still be required to attend the event and avoid unnecessary use of resources.

**TPS is pursuing digital strategies through its Platform & Transformation Program**

TPS recently started planning for a Digital Workflow project as part of its Platform & Transformation Program. The project includes leveraging platforms to divert calls to automate service delivery by using digital technology to help manage lower priority and/or low risk calls, freeing up time of the 9-1-1- PSAP operations and police resources for handling urgent emergency calls.

### **Explore Funding and Staffing Strategies to Address Priority Areas**

**Enacting change will be contingent on the availability of adequate resources**

Improving data quality and enhancing the use of data and technology has the potential to result in benefits across the front-line policing continuum and for the people of Toronto. However, both projects highlight that successfully enacting change will be contingent upon the availability of adequate resources.

TPS and the City will need to work together to determine funding strategies to ensure the journey of change is successful.

#### Considering Funding Strategies

In *TPS - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations*, we highlighted that most provinces in Canada have legislated government 9-1-1 levies that they charge to mobile phone users and/or landline users for the provision of 9-1-1 services.

**Estimated potential annual 9-1-1 levy revenue of \$28.8M (\$144M over 5-year period)**

While legislation does not exist in Ontario to charge and remit 9-1-1 levies to the PSAP (in Toronto this is the TPS 9-1-1 call centre), section 259 of the *City of Toronto Act* allows for it. We estimated a potential annual 9-1-1 levy of \$28.8 million (\$144 million over five-year period) using a monthly 9-1-1 levy of \$1 per mobile device subscriber in Toronto.

**Potential funding could assist with technological solutions along the front-line continuum**

This potential funding could assist with implementing the mandated Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG 9-1-1) requirements<sup>1</sup>, as well as with implementing some of the recommendations included in both reports, such as improving data and information management systems, technological solutions to better support communications operators, and increasing call diversion for certain lower priority or lower risk calls.

**The City will need to engage other levels of government to obtain funding**

In addition, while improved data will help TPS in identifying calls for service that could possibly be addressed by alternative responses, active leadership will be needed from the City in engaging all levels of government to work together to obtain the funding needed, particularly in the area of mental health.

In *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service*, we highlighted that underinvestment in mental health resources in Canada has also meant that people with mental health challenges may not always receive the supports they need<sup>2</sup>. This sometimes results in police officers becoming the default first responders in some situations involving those in crisis.

There is a need for sufficient investment in sustainable social service infrastructure, including the areas of mental health and addictions and homelessness, to create long-term value-for-money through better supports and outcomes for individuals and the community. This will require a whole-of-government approach, with considerable seed funding needed from the Provincial and Federal government. The need for this funding from other levels of government is also supported by our recent audits of the City's shelters and affordable housing program.

#### Reviewing and Exploring Staffing Strategies to Address Challenges

**TPS needs to examine its staffing strategies**

In both our projects we also identified that TPS needs to examine its staffing strategies in order to ensure that priority areas are adequately staffed and that staffing decisions are supported with high-quality data.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2017, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission mandated a country-wide upgrade to the telecommunication networks to a digital or Internet Protocol based 9-1-1 system, commonly referred to as Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) to provide more than just voice services for emergency call centres. NG9-1-1 will provide a digital system for PSAPs that will allow sending text messages or photos, videos, and other types of data to 9-1-1 operators, in addition to making the voice 9-1-1 calls.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Changing Directions, Changing Lives: The Mental Health Strategy of Canada* report, the Mental Health Commission of Canada indicates that "...given the historical neglect of the mental health sector, the Strategy recognizes the need to invest more so that mental health outcomes can be improved." and that "...in any given year, one in five people in Canada experiences a mental health problem or illness, with a cost to the economy of well in excess of \$50 billion" ([Link to Changing Directions, Changing Lives report](#))

Improving data quality and further using data and automation will help provide some of the information needed to help TPS better manage its workforce and implement staffing strategies along the front-line policing continuum. It will also help TPS to identify trends to better support the wellness of its communications operators and front-line officers.

**More available and deployable staff, along with other strategies, may be needed to ensure TPS is achieving its 9-1-1 service levels**

In *TPS - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations*, we noted that more available and deployable staff, particularly during peak periods, and other strategies to minimize non-emergency calls (including abandoned/hang-up/pocket dial calls or calls for non-police matters) may be needed to ensure TPS is achieving its service levels and improving 9-1-1 call answering times, particularly during peak periods.

Also, other strategies are needed to minimize the number staff who are off on short term/long-term absences, address rising overtime hours worked, and to improve recruitment processes and retention.

**Staffing may be one of the root causes of increasing response times**

In *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service*, we noted that response times are increasing, and that staffing may be one of the root causes that will need to be examined further along with other potential causes, as well as increasing clearance times<sup>3</sup>.

PRU officers can be unavailable to respond to calls for service for a variety of reasons, including being on other lower priority non-emergency calls. They can also not be deployable for reasons such as being on leave due to a disability or illness. Management reported that in 2019, the range of deployable PRU officers (available to respond to calls for service) per division ranged from 77 per cent to 94 per cent.

By understanding the data and root causes for increasing response times, it will help TPS to address these and improve the timeliness of its emergency response.

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<sup>3</sup> Clearance time is defined by TPS as the difference in time between when officers arrive on scene to a call for service and when they are available to be dispatched to a new call for service. Clearance time can include the time taken to resolve the call for service and also completing any notes, reports, or other investigative requirements.

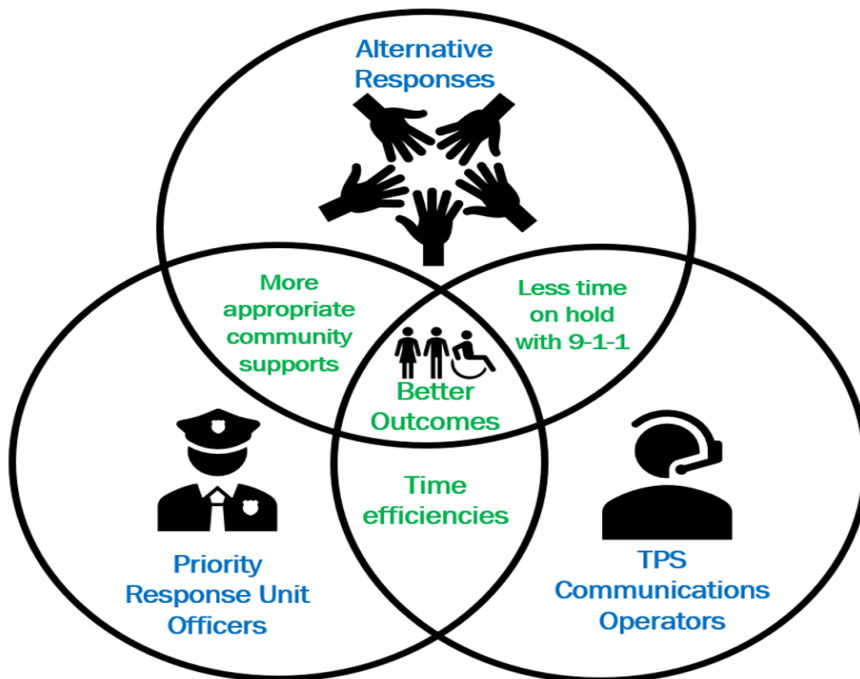
**2. Further Explore Call-for-Service Alternative Responses** to free up time of Priority Response Unit officers and 9-1-1 communications operators, and help provide better outcomes for people

**Benefits of exploring alternative call for service responses would have many positive impacts**

In *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service*, we found that there were certain lower priority non-emergency calls for service<sup>4</sup> that likely did not require a PRU police response. We recommended that the City, in collaboration with TPS and other stakeholders, explore alternative police or non-police responses to a traditional PRU response for certain types of calls for service.

The benefits of exploring alternative responses to certain calls for service would likely spread along the front-line policing continuum, and have positive impacts on TPS Communications Services, PRU officers, and the people of Toronto. This is highlighted in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Benefits of Alternative Responses



<sup>4</sup> We identified six event types (Check Address, Check Well-Being, Unwanted Guest, Dispute, Landlord & Tenant Disputes, and Noisy Parties), as having the greatest opportunity for a non-PRU response. We used these six event types (all default priority four level) as a window to see what is possible, but there may be other event types that have potential for alternative police or non-police response.

## **PRU Officers & Communications Operators**

**Alternative responses would likely free up time for PRU officers and communications operators**

Diverting certain non-emergency calls to alternative responses would free-up PRU officer time to allow officers to address higher priority emergency calls, help reduce response times, and address some other TPS strategic priorities.

Time efficiencies would likely also be realized in the call centre, which operates on a demand-based model. Given that call volume impacts 9-1-1 call answering wait times, diverting calls to alternative responses (e.g. 2-1-1, 3-1-1, other reporting mechanisms for non-emergencies) may reduce how long callers are waiting on the line before their 9-1-1 calls are answered, and also help promote the health and well-being of communications operators in light of stressors created by staffing constraints.

## **Improving Outcomes for People, Particularly Vulnerable Individuals**

**Alternative responses would also benefit the people of Toronto**

The City and the public would also benefit from considering alternative responses. If 9-1-1 calls are answered in a timelier fashion and PRU officers are attending less non-emergency calls, this may help to improve response times and help officers get to emergency, sometimes life-threatening calls for service, faster.

In our review, we noted that persons experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges often need community and other supports to address root causes that a police emergency response was not intended to and cannot resolve. Alternative responses, such as street outreach services that can help connect people with community supports or shelter, may help produce better, more long-lasting outcomes. Strategic responses will have benefits at many levels, but it all begins with better data as discussed earlier in Theme 1 of this report.



## **Building Understanding**

**Our projects aimed to build understanding and then work with stakeholders to explore a different way of doing things**

In *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service*, we explored whether some calls for service should be handled by an alternative response. In terms of our overall initial impression from City staff, we heard that they would like more openness and sharing of information by TPS, and concern that TPS may want to send a police response to 9-1-1 calls for service even if a non-police alternative response may be more appropriate and effective. As we progressed through this project, we came to understand why City staff may have felt that way.

**We heard from TPS staff that they care and want to help people**

Initially, not all TPS staff we heard from embraced the idea of exploring areas where police may not be required. We came to understand that this sentiment arises in part from their public duty to serve. What we heard from TPS members during our projects was that police officers care and want to help people, and they feel they need to respond if someone calls for their help.

We heard from TPS members during our projects that PRU officers are responding to lower priority non-emergency calls for service that could have an alternative response because:

1. They are called to respond, and someone needs help – it may also help prevent a situation from escalating and becoming a higher priority emergency call.
2. There is no alternative service that can respond, or it is not available 24/7 when needed.
3. If they don't go and something goes wrong, not only is there a risk to someone's life or safety, but there is a legal risk for TPS.

**TPS has effectively become the default response for some calls and this has become commonly accepted**

We heard agreement from TPS, the TPSB, the Toronto Police Association, and City management that police have effectively become the default response for some calls, as there have not been effective alternative non-police responses available at the time needed. TPS also advised us that this has become the norm for some PRU officers as they have not experienced having alternative non-police responses available when needed.

We also heard concerns from TPS members about the level of deployable staff and increasing response times. Some TPS members also expressed that they did not feel confident that future alternative responses would truly be effective and available 24/7, and that if funding was transferred away from TPS for these programs, that police may still need to go to the same calls for service, but with fewer staff available.

As we moved through the project, conducted the analysis, and shared with TPS that we were focussing on the non-emergency priority 4 to 6 calls for service and examining the potential for alternative responses contingent on their availability, there was more openness to the concept that some calls for service could have an alternative non-police response in the future.

**Evidence-based information helped to start the conversation and increase openness and support**

A key part of this project that helped with everyone's understanding was the evidence we gathered. We used evidence-based information and our initial results to start the conversation. We began to see better understanding from everyone of the potential opportunities and benefits, as well as support by TPS for alternative responses. Stated another way, having better information about what the calls for service contained and considering alternative responses only if they are reliable, helped in gaining the current level of support.

In our sample review, we did not observe a bias on the part of communications operators during our audit of the 9-1-1 PSAP to send PRU officers to all 9-1-1 calls. Instead, mitigation of risk appeared to be an important factor embedded in the policy manual for TPS communications operators. In other words, if PRU officers were not sent and something went wrong later, most importantly there could be an impact to someone's safety or life, and secondly, TPS's legal risk may increase. When we explored the idea of another call line for the public for non-police alternative response (e.g. 2-1-1), there was openness by TPS, as it provides another option for the public.

Our reports provide evidenced-based analyses to start the discussion to explore alternative responses, and in the future to route calls to the best alternative for that call, whether it be police or an alternative non-police response. Better information systems are needed to support continuing analysis that will identify opportunities to shift some calls in the future and the foundation for more transparency and accountability.

We hope that our reports help to build understanding between TPS and the City and other stakeholders. From what we've seen and observed, TPS wants to transform and build better outcomes for people, and this is strongly supported by the TPSB.

**TPS has expressed support for exploring pilots for non-police alternative response**

TPS has expressed support for the exploration and evaluation of pilots for non-police alternative response and the willingness to work together with the City on these. At the same time, TPS pointed out that every call for service has the potential for danger and that sometimes things go sideways, and police are needed. So there needs to be careful consideration for non-police alternative responses in working with the City, to ensure the services are in place and consideration of risks, including safety and liability.

We recognize that many calls for service have the potential for danger, and that sometimes police will still be needed for some lower priority non-emergency calls. However, there are still opportunities for alternative response that we've identified that are worth exploring. We believe TPS is ready to continue to work with the City on the next step in the journey.

### 3. Build Greater Community Education and Awareness to help manage demand on the 9-1-1 line and expectations that a PRU officer response is primarily for emergencies and police matters

#### Increased Public Education & Awareness May Lead to Better Outcomes

Greater community education and awareness is needed

Call for service demand is heavily influenced by community behaviours. Many calls that TPS receives are not emergencies or police matters, yet some degree of call-taker and/or PRU resources are expended for every call received.

Our projects highlighted the need to build greater community education and awareness around “making the right call” when it comes to how to report emergency and non-emergency events, including when to use the:

- 9-1-1 emergency phone line and the information to provide upon calling;
- TPS non-emergency phone line for police matters (416-808-2222);
- TPS online reporting webpage;
- City’s 3-1-1 phone line, for non-emergency City services, program and information; and,
- 2-1-1 phone line, or other community agencies, for information on and referral to community and social services

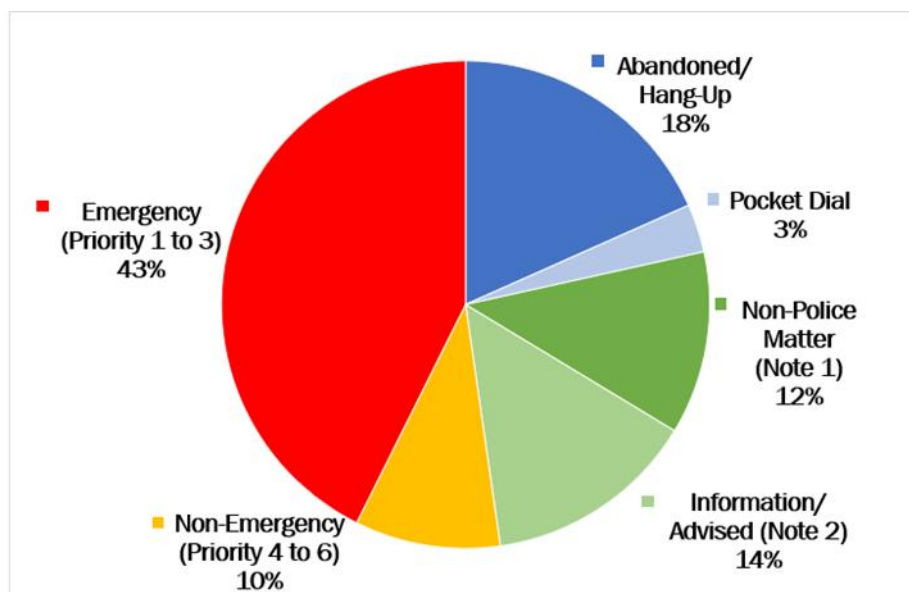
Over half of the calls made to 9-1-1 were not for emergency assistance

In *TPS - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations*, we noted as shown in Figure 6 below, that from January 2018 to July 2021, 57 per cent of the calls to 9-1-1 were not for emergency assistance.

Of these non-emergency related calls, 21 per cent were for abandoned/hang-up/pocket dial calls, 14 per cent for ‘information/advice’ calls, 12 per cent for non-police matters, and 10 per cent were for lower priority non-emergency calls.

This may indicate the need for better clarity and communication to the public on when to use the 9-1-1 emergency phone line, and the options of TPS’s non-emergency line (416-808-2222) or alternative non-police resources like 2-1-1 and 3-1-1.

Figure 6: Breakdown of the Types of Calls Received Through the 9-1-1 Line, January 2018 to July 2021



<sup>1</sup> Non-police matter calls were either 3-1-1 or 2-1-1 referrals, or it was determined by the communications operators that no police response was required for a 9-1-1 dialed call.

<sup>2</sup> These calls were for information / advice and assigned as “Advised” event type by call takers. This event type has a default Priority 6 and is categorized as a miscellaneous non-emergency event type. It is used when a caller is asking for referral information or advice (e.g. information on Collision Reporting Centre, Animal Control, see a lawyer, civil matter, etc.).

**Improving public awareness and understanding is needed**

Improving public awareness and understanding is needed so that public expectations are managed to expect that PRU officers are to respond primarily to emergencies and police matters, and that other resources should be used for non-police matters or non-emergencies not requiring police (e.g. landlord and tenant disputes with no imminent danger/harm).

This should help to reduce the volume of 9-1-1 calls and may also allow front-line police resources to focus primarily on responding to emergency calls and addressing some other TPS priorities, such as further helping to prevent and address child exploitation and strengthening the investigations of missing persons.

**Roles and responsibilities related to call diversion to 3-1-1 may need to be reinforced**

While both projects highlighted the need for greater public awareness and education around when to call other non-police alternatives, specifically 3-1-1, we also found that greater awareness and reinforcement of 3-1-1 and TPS staff roles and responsibilities may also be required.

In *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service*, we noted that the shared response model between 3-1-1 Toronto and TPS may not always be clearly understood by staff. For example, there were complaints from the public about being misdirected by 3-1-1 and TPS about which entity would resolve their concerns, which seemed to cause frustration for people.

Regular joint evaluation between TPS and the City will be required to ensure that TPS is using its call-taking and PRU resources in the most effective way and that residents receive a satisfactory level of service.

### **Addressing Public Perceptions of Vulnerable Residents**

**Public awareness and societal perceptions may need to be addressed**

There may also be a need to address societal perceptions about people experiencing mental health issues and/or homelessness. These groups may experience stigma and discrimination, including fears that they may be violent.

These biases can lead to calls for police (e.g. request for a person to leave who is experiencing homelessness, panhandling outside a restaurant, and not demonstrating disorderly or violent behaviour), which in turn ties up time for the communications operators and PRU officers, without addressing the root cause and may not provide the required support to the individuals in need.

**“Toronto For All” initiative may be helpful in educating public**

Since 2016, the City of Toronto has collaborated with community partners through its “Toronto For All” initiative to create public awareness campaigns challenging implicit biases, negative attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices that contribute to systemic barriers to respect, inclusion, and equity.

There may be an opportunity for the City to use this initiative to draw attention to these perceptions and to highlight when to consider if a non-police response, such as calling the City’s Streets to Homes Outreach Program, may be more appropriate, recognizing that police may still be needed depending on the circumstances.

#### 4. Enhance Response Time Methodology and Improve Emergency Response Times and 9-1-1 Call Answering Times

TPS response times have been increasing over the last several years

TPS uses response times as a metric in assessing service performance and has experienced increasing response times over the last several years.

Average response time was 19.1 minutes for priority 1 and 50 minutes for priority 2 in 2019

For example, average response times for priority one calls for service have increased about 19 per cent from 2017 to 2019 and 17 per cent for priority two calls for service. As shown in Table 1 below, the average time for TPS to respond to a priority one call for service in 2019 was 19.1 minutes, and 50 minutes for a priority two call for service<sup>5</sup>.

Table 1: Average Response Times from January 2017 to September 2021 and 2019 Performance Compared to 1995 Targets<sup>6</sup>

Priority Level	Average Response Time (Minutes)					2019 Performance Compared to Targets	
	2017	2018	2019	2020	Jan to Sept 2021	1995 Target (mins)	% Not Met
1	16.0	18.4	19.1	15.0	17.5	6	72%
2	42.6	45.5	50.0	39.2	45.9	6	92%
3	74.5	85.6	95.4	67.8	92.6	6	96%
4	94.6	109.2	120.3	89.4	110.9	60	41%
5	58.5	76.4	320.2	253.7	319.8	60	67%
6	189.9	268.2	299.2	244.9	282.2	60	57%

<sup>5</sup> Response times are based on data provided by TPS (unaudited).

<sup>6</sup> At its March 1995 meeting, the Metropolitan Toronto Police Services Board (now the Toronto Police Services Board) approved recommendations from the report “Beyond 2000: Final Report” which resulted from the work of the Metropolitan Toronto Police Restructuring Task Force. Recommendation 11 of that report included response time standards and directed that the Metropolitan Toronto Police Force (now TPS) review at regular intervals its ability to achieve and maintain these standards and make adjustments as required. The TPSB Office reported that no further changes to response time standards have been formally adopted since 1995.

While response time objectives were approved by the Board in 1995, based on our discussions with TPS management they are not regularly used or measured against as formal organizational performance metrics<sup>7</sup>, nor do they appear to have been evaluated or revised in the intervening time. The 1995 response time targets and the associated 2019 performance is displayed in Table 1 above.

**TPS is not meeting its response time targets**

TPS's response time targets are not being met. In 2019, TPS did not meet its target of six minutes, 72 per cent of the time for priority one and 92 per cent of the time for priority two calls for service.

Although we were initially provided with updated response time targets (priority one – 10 minutes, 85% of the time, priority two/three – 16 minutes, priority four to six – 60 minutes), these have not been included for comparison purposes. Based on the information provided to us, these targets were designed to be used for development of the PRU alternative shift schedules, and not for TPS's response time performance metrics<sup>8</sup>, and have not been formally approved by the TPSB or TPS.

**TPS should re-focus its efforts on improving response times**

Our work through both projects demonstrates that TPS response time performance is impacted by various factors along the front-line policing continuum and that an organizational focus on improving response times is needed.

However, as TPS looks at improving response times, this issue cannot be examined in a siloed manner. A comprehensive approach that considers all relevant TPS units, including both Communications Services and PRU performance, is needed.

For example, *TPS - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations* found that the timeliness of call answering (impacted by call volume and staffing levels) is an area that needs improvement so that people receive the emergency response needed as soon as possible, and a person's life or safety can be at risk.

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5

<sup>8</sup> The Toronto Police Association advised us that a consultant was engaged to analyze PRU staffing and workload, as well as alternative shift schedules and as part of this work developed and used updated response time targets solely related to the travel time of officers.



**TPS generally did not meet its service level standard for 9-1-1 call answering time; daily average wait time did improve**

TPS did not generally meet its service level standard for answering 9-1-1 calls throughout 2018 to 2021; there were a limited number of days when the service level was met. Many other jurisdictions are also challenged in meeting the timeframe required by the industry standard<sup>9</sup>. We noted an improvement in TPS's daily average wait time. For example, in 2018 there were 117 days in which a 9-1-1 call on average needed to wait for more than 30 seconds to be answered, and this decreased to 67 days in 2021.

**9-1-1 call answering time delays can vary significantly throughout the day**

However, we found that the average 9-1-1 call answering delay varies significantly throughout the day (i.e. how timely a call can be answered depends on the time of the day a caller calls for assistance).

During non-peak hours<sup>10</sup> in 2021, the average call answering wait time was seven seconds, but during the highest peak hours (2:45 to 9:30 pm) it was 28 seconds, which is almost twice the industry standard. In 2021, at least 13,260 calls that dialed 9-1-1 waited more than a minute to be answered, and of these at least 424 waited more than four minutes. In addition, there were a few days between 2018 to 2021 where the longest answering wait time for some calls was between 10 to 11 minutes.

**Dispatchers can face challenges when officers do not indicate their availability to attend calls for service**

In addition, dispatch times can be quite long, however the dispatchers are reliant on there being available police officer units to accept a dispatched event. They do not dispatch another event to an officer who has not cleared a previously accepted event, as they presume that the officer is addressing the event until it has been cleared. This means that communication of clearance and arrival times by officers to dispatchers is very important, so that officers indicate their availability to receive the next event.

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<sup>9</sup> The widely accepted industry standard is established by the National Emergency Number Association (NENA). NENA 9-1-1 call processing standard (<https://www.nena.org/page/CallProcessingStd>) requires that "90% of all 9-1-1 calls be answered within 15 seconds and 95% answered within 20 seconds". The Toronto's 9-1-1 PSAP adopts and measures its performances against the first standard but not the second one. NENA updated the standard in April 2020 and TPS adopted this updated standard in December 2020. The previous NENA standard required 90 per cent of all 9-1-1 calls to be answered within 10 seconds during the busy hour (i.e., the hour each day with the greatest call volume). TPS applied this standard to all 9-1-1 calls not just those received during the busy hour.

<sup>10</sup> From 11:30 pm to 10:30 am

**Officers need to consistently advise dispatchers of status so that dispatchers know when they are available**

We noted that from January 2018 to July 2021, about 21<sup>11</sup> per cent of the time officers did not report their “at-scene” arrival time, either by pressing the button in their mobile workstations or letting the dispatcher know they have arrived.

Similarly, officers also need to consistently press the button in their mobile workstations or let the dispatcher know when they have cleared the call for service event. Otherwise, dispatchers may presume officers are still actively on a call, and this can delay assigning outstanding calls for service, depending on availability of other police officer units.

**PRU staffing and clearance times may also play a role in response times**

At the same time, PRU staffing and clearance times may also play a role in response times. Our *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service* highlighted that call clearance times have been steadily rising, and that average clearance times increased almost 15 per cent from 2017 to 2019. When calls for service take longer to clear, this means that other calls for service can remain pending for longer waiting for a police response, including emergency situations.

Also, if officers are tied up on a lower priority non-emergency call for service, it can impact their availability and response times for higher priority emergency calls for service. It will be important for TPS to use improved data and better understand the root causes of increasing response and clearance times. This includes staffing levels and other factors, and the differences across police divisions and between event types, in order to ensure calls for service are handled efficiently and that officers can respond to high priority emergency calls for service as quickly as possible.

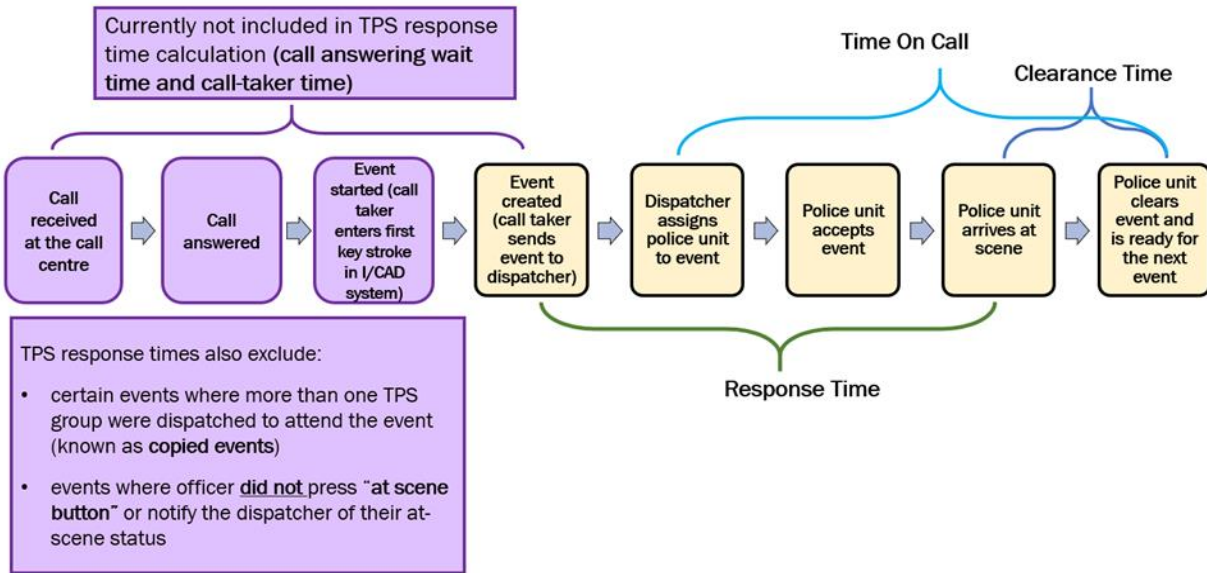
**Response time measurement needs to be complete in order to be an effective tool**

As shown in Figure 7, both projects also examined improvements needed for how TPS measures response times, including the addition of call-answering times (shown in purple boxes in Figure 7 below) in the response time calculation and inclusion of events where historically the officer “at-scene” time was not captured.

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<sup>11</sup> The Auditor General’s two TPS reports both present “at-scene” non-compliance rates (rate of how often button was not pushed to inform dispatcher that officer had arrived on scene) for different time periods and slightly different populations. *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service* was about 30 per cent (70 per cent compliance) using response time data for 2019, provided by TPS for only events where at least one PRU unit was dispatched to an event during the year. *TPS - Audit of 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Point Operations* was about 21 per cent based on all calls for service from January 2018 to July 2021 that the TPS call centre received.

Figure 7: TPS Response Time Calculation



In order for response time to be an effective performance metric for both Communications Services and the PRU, the calculation of response times must be complete and representative of actual operating performance.

**5. Recognize that this is a Journey of Collaboration Between the City, TPS, and Other Stakeholders to Build Better Outcomes by Moving Forward Together**

**There is no quick fix - careful consideration for alternative non-police responses will be needed**

A key message highlighted in both projects is that there is no quick fix and simply moving funding for call for service response from TPS to other areas of the City will not be effective and it is not enough. There needs to be sufficient investment in the infrastructure and community supports and services that needs to be in place, particularly in the areas of mental health and homelessness, to ensure that potential alternative responses are effective. Any pilots for non-police alternative responses will also need to be carefully considered, with independent evaluations done of the pilots before fully rolling out.

**A journey of change is needed**

This change will not happen overnight – it is a journey of change that TPS and the City need to embark on together. It starts with continued analysis of the data and working with the City to explore what can be done.

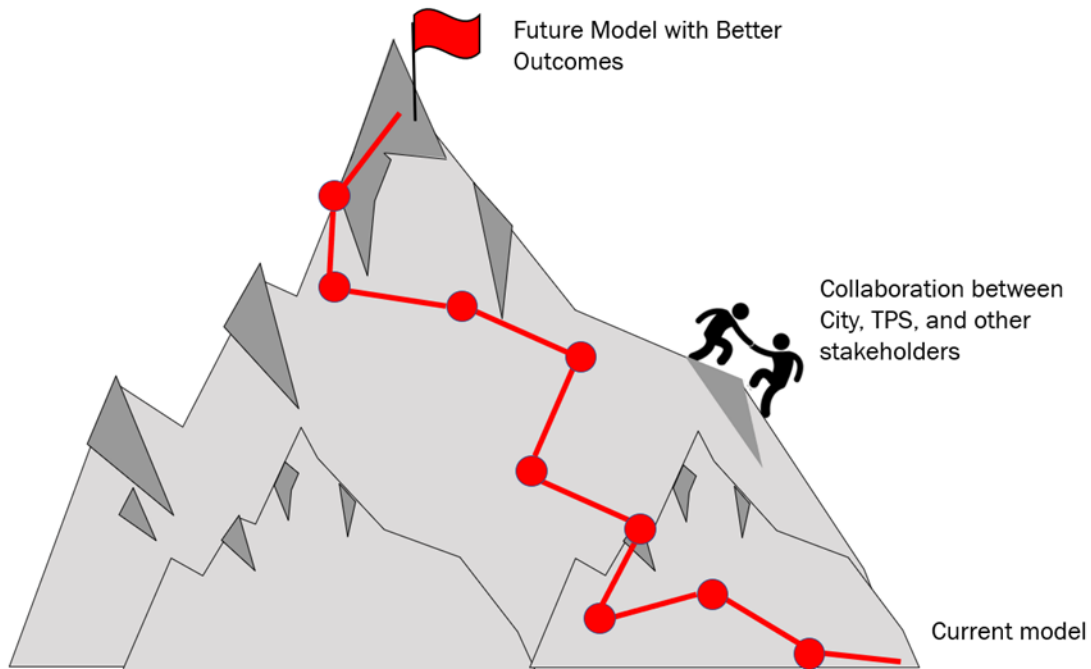
**Leadership and collaboration are needed for change to happen**

As highlighted in Figure 8, active leadership and commitment from the City will be needed. However, the journey will also not be successful without collaboration and partnership from TPS and other agencies.

In *Review of TPS - Opportunities to Support More Effective Responses to Calls for Service*, we highlight that alternative non-police responses may help free up PRU officer time, and by extension, the time of communications operators. It should also help manage demand in the 9-1-1 PSAP operations, particularly in reducing the handling time for non-emergency calls or non-police matters.

Improving community safety and well-being will require active leadership and commitment from the City, and multi-sector collaboration and partnership in pursuing alternative responses. Progress towards this goal will allow TPS to further focus on its strategic priorities. It is important for stakeholders to support one another to achieve the best possible outcomes for the people of Toronto.

**Figure 8: A Journey Towards Change is Needed**



**TPS’s call centre pilot and Toronto’s Community Crisis Service pilots have launched**

Both the City and TPS have launched pilots aimed at diverting certain non-emergency mental health-related calls for service to trained mental health crisis workers, instead of police officers. In February 2021, City Council endorsed the Toronto Community Crisis Service project to be piloted in four areas of the City. These pilots will test a new community-led approach to mental health crisis calls for service. There are currently two of these pilots actively running in Toronto, led by anchor partners Gerstein Crisis Centre and TAIBU Community Health Centre, with another two planned to begin in July 2022. At the same time, TPS has also launched its own pilot, the Gerstein Crisis Centre call for service diversion pilot.

The pilots, subject to evaluation, may be helpful in providing alternative non-police strategies. The Toronto Community Crisis Service model may prove to be an effective alternative response model for consideration (subject to evaluation of pilots) and may also provide the framework for developing other non-police alternative response pilots.

**City should consider other non-police alternative responses**

The City, in collaboration with TPS and other agencies should continue to explore non-police alternative responses that are able to provide wrap-around and community-based supports that could also help promote better outcomes and address the root cause of issues for vulnerable populations within the city, especially those experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges.

**Existing models may present options if adequately adapted**

This could include considering if existing City programs, such as the Municipal Licensing and Standards Division by-law officer response for by-law issues (e.g. potentially for noisy small gatherings) and the Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division Streets to Homes outreach teams for supporting people experiencing homelessness, can be adapted to provide timely and effective non-police alternative responses. However, this will also require the City to assess the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of changing the approach currently in use by these programs.

### **Conclusion**

**The two reports should be considered holistically**

As outlined in this common themes report, the two reports should be considered holistically. Together, they cover the continuum of front-line policing – from the call to 9-1-1 being received, through to the response on scene by the police officer.

We observed that TPS has effectively become the default response on some lower priority non-emergency calls, due in part to the lack of available effective alternate responses at the times they are needed. However, there is the potential for some of these calls for service to be handled differently, if an effective and timely alternative response were to be available when needed.

**Modernizing and enhancing the way data is captured and leveraged is key**

Modernizing and enhancing the way data is captured and leveraged provides the opportunity for TPS to work with the City and stakeholders in an informed way to divert some non-emergency 9-1-1 calls, as well as some calls for service to alternative responses that may be able to provide more appropriate supports. Improved data will also help TPS in managing staffing levels of its 9-1-1 PSAP operations to improve 9-1-1 call answering times and achieve its service levels.

**There is no quick fix to some of the issues discussed in our reports**

It is important to note that in our view, after an extensive amount of time examining the issues highlighted in our projects, that there is no quick fix. A simple ‘lift and shift’ or transfer of calls for service and funding from TPS to the City is not the most effective solution and is not enough. Instead, a strategy of gradual transition is needed for alternative non-police responses where appropriate, with the shared goal to improve outcomes for the people of Toronto.

These are complex matters needing better information to support transition. Opportunities for alternative responses may grow over time as better information is captured and analyzed, and while alternative responses are piloted and evaluated for potential further roll-out.

**Once pilots for alternative non-police responses have been established and evaluated, funding levels and sources should be re-assessed**

Once the pilots for alternative non-police responses have been established and evaluated, which will likely take several years, funding levels and sources should be re-assessed. Other factors impacting both TPS and the City should also be considered, including the population growth, the demand level to meet the needs of vulnerable people, strategic priorities and resourcing to achieve them, as well as other considerations such as the impact of mandated NG9-1-1 requirements.

**Whole-of-government approach is needed, including sufficient investment in social service infrastructure**

There is a need for sufficient investment in sustainable social service infrastructure, including the areas of mental health and addictions and homelessness, to create long-term value-for-money through better supports and outcomes for individuals and the community. This will require a whole-of-government approach, with considerable seed funding needed from the Provincial and Federal government. The need for this funding from other levels of government is also supported by our recent audits of the City's shelters and affordable housing program.

Until the alternative responses are effective and available when needed, PRU officers may still be required to attend these calls for service. In addition, we have identified concerns relating to increasing response times and 9-1-1 call answering delays. Time that is saved for PRU officers and communications operators can help to address this and other TPS strategic priorities.

Concrete community-wide plans that include the desired outcomes from 9-1-1 calls and a framework to capture data and track and evaluate pilot outcomes is needed. This will help the City, TPS, and other stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions and ensure transparency and accountability as all stakeholders move forward together.

**Public also has a role to play in “making the right call”**

The public also needs to play a role, both in helping to ensure 9-1-1 calls are only made for emergencies, and in its expectations for when police officers are required.

We have provided recommendations in two reports to the TPSB, which we believe provide a starting point for TPS and the City to continue to work together with each other and with other stakeholders, with the shared goal to achieve more effective outcomes for the people of Toronto through more effective and responses to calls for service.

**AUDITOR  
GENERAL**  

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**TORONTO**