

# KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATION INFO SHEET

An alternative first responder refers to people outside of law enforcement (police) who respond to calls for assistance. They are often community members and/or professionals who are deeply connected to, and understand, the communities they serve. Alternative first responders are highly skilled in helping people get the right care without using force, supporting autonomy by letting individuals decide what they need and how they receive help. They also have the skills to de-escalate situations, reduce harm, and connect people with a wide range of support – both practical and therapeutic.

*The information shared below can be found on [alternativefirstresponders.com.au](https://www.alternativefirstresponders.com.au)*

In the years 2017- 2022, 43% of critical incidents (incidents involving serious injury to or death of a person interacting with police) recorded by NSW Police involved a person experiencing 'mental health crisis'. Similar patterns have been noted in other states, including Victoria, where people who access mental health services are six times more likely than average to be fatally shot by police.

Recent data shows that between 2020 and 2022, 1 in 5 individuals experienced a mental health disorder, with a notable rise in cases among those aged 16 to 24 over the past 15 years.

The School Exclusion Project: Research Report outlines damning evidence of the negative consequences of police intervention in schools, noting that young people who encounter a police response at an early age are more likely to spend time in prison as an adult.

In Victoria every 10 minutes, someone is in need of mental health assistance, that is then being responded to by police.

In the US there are over 250 AFR units where they are all accessible directly or through emergency response triage.

A 2022 report found that over 90% of Victoria Police's Critical Incident Response Team identified as cisgender men, raising serious issues and risks when those officers are tasked with responding to incidents of domestic and family violence.

In 2021, a staggering 1 in 3 of all fatal police shootings involve people with mental illness in 'crisis'.

A NSW Police internal review in 2024 found that on average a mental health incident is attended/ recorded by NSWPF every 9 minutes and this had increased (approximately 10%) each year since 2018. The report also found that NSW Police often act as "an escalating factor" for potential adverse outcomes when attending mental health incidents.

The Jungarni-Jutiya Indigenous Corporation has started a community-led night patrol in Halls Creek with the goal of keeping young people safe and supported. Since it began in October this year the night patrol has engaged with over 40 young people per night, offering lifts and a range of activities.

Across Australia, 39% of people aged between 16 and 85 with a history of homelessness reported experiencing a mental health condition within the past year. Specialist Homelessness Services reported that 9.5% of clients in 2022-23 had a disability.

Currently, the expenses of the Western Australian Police are over \$1 billion per year which the government justifies as 'keeping the community safe'; yet, programs allocated less than \$1 million per year, that actively and visibly uphold community safety, have funding cut or are merely allocated one off amounts with government refusal to provide more.

Alternative policing and alternative first-responder models reduce criminal justice system involvement and lessen the likelihood of arrest by 58%, significantly reduce levels of specific crime, improve health and wellbeing (especially for people with mental health conditions) and address the social drivers of incarceration while avoiding contact with police.

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Research co-produced with people who have been apprehended under mental health laws found that the use of force, including tasers, pepper spray, and being locked in police vans, was common practice.<sup>[4]</sup> Such encounters have significant and ongoing impacts: trauma, loss of employment, fear of future police attendance, and ongoing stigma.<sup>[5]</sup> These cases illustrate not just isolated failings, but a system that perpetrates harm and rarely faces accountability. It is also a system that is harmful to police officers.<sup>[6]</sup> Indeed, many police officers feel ill-equipped to respond to a person experiencing a mental health crisis, and the tools available to them are not fit-for-purpose.<sup>[7]</sup>

90% of frontline workers have witnessed police violence and discrimination, this demonstrates that the very agencies tasked with responding to family violence has a problem with abusers within its own ranks.

According to the NSW Government, the number of rough sleepers has grown by nearly 70% in five years, from 1,314 in 2020 to 2,192 in 2025.

The data tells a different story to the headlines. Youth crime in Australia is not rising, it's falling. With youth offending down 28% over the past decade and public order offences dropping by more than 74%, the question is, why are we investing in police? And, why aren't we investing in community services that are clearly working.

A coronial inquest into the deaths of 10 people has strongly criticised how police respond to mental health distress. The inquest follows an investigation by The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission (LECC) that exposed severe under-resourcing in NSW Police's mental health response training, with the former Mental Health Intervention Team consisting of just three staff members – with only one officer responsible for training the entire NSW Police force.

"Systems that work with people, not against them, save lives, reduce trauma, and create safer outcomes for everyone involved - including families, responders, and the wider community. That's why this is important to me." [PUBLIC PLEDGE]

"The trauma associated with Police being first responders is real, and should be avoided as much as possible. As some Police have demonstrated recently, overall they can lack compassion and understanding which is vital for people experiencing challenging mental health issues." [PUBLIC PLEDGE]

"I do not believe that the police as an institution can be reformed to a point where they prevent more harm than they cause. There is no evidence base that their approach creates safety or prevents 'crime'. We need to develop alternatives, and those alternatives need to remain in the hands of the communities they serve. As communities, we need to take on this responsibility with care and grace, and step up to be the alternative we want to see." [PUBLIC PLEDGE]

"You talk about right response starts with the right people well for the Indigenous community in Western Australia are forgotten about when it come to being the right people, for the Indigenous culture it about Right Person from the Right Country to stop the breaching of Indigenous Cultural Protocols." [PUBLIC PLEDGE]