

THE  
CARTER CENTER



# Policing Alternatives

**A Public Opinion Survey**

October 2025



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<sup>1</sup> A quality-of-life concern was defined in the study as struggles with mental health, substance use, or poverty.

# Acronyms and Definitions

<b>APD</b>	Atlanta Police Department
<b>Alternative Response</b>	A non-police first responder program that provides an alternative to traditional first response, especially law enforcement
<b>DBHDD</b>	Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities
<b>Decriminalization</b>	The process by which actions that have previously been deemed and treated as criminal are reclassified as noncriminal matters to support more rehabilitative approaches
<b>Diversion</b>	An intervention through which individuals are removed from the criminal legal system and integrated into programs that prioritize resources, care, and services. These interventions can happen at the pre-arrest or post-booking stages or be court-ordered.
<b>Deflection<sup>2</sup></b>	Deflection directs people to other systems or services prior to any law enforcement contact.
<b>Generation Z</b>	Generation Z, or Gen Z, refers broadly to individuals born in the 1990s and early 2000s. For this study, Gen Z generally refers to respondents ages 18-24, as the next age group, 25-34, includes both Gen Z and Millennials.
<b>MARTA</b>	Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority
<b>NAMI</b>	National Alliance on Mental Illness
<b>PAD</b>	Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative in Atlanta
<b>PAIReD</b>	Policy, Awareness, and Investment for Alternative Response and Decarceration

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<sup>2</sup> Definition provided by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

# Executive Summary

Since 1980, incarceration in the U.S. has increased by about 400%<sup>3</sup>, despite crime largely decreasing from the 1990s to the present.<sup>4</sup> Over 40% of incarcerated individuals have been diagnosed with a mental health condition<sup>5</sup>—almost double that of the general population.<sup>6</sup> As the human and financial costs of incarceration rise, alternative solutions are urgently needed in communities across the U.S. to address the needs of those struggling with mental health conditions, substance use concerns, and extreme poverty.

The growing recognition of the ineffectiveness of punitive approaches to these quality-of-life issues has prompted communities to explore alternative public health and safety measures. For more than 10 years, activists and organizations in Atlanta have been developing ways to support and care for vulnerable members of their community. The Policing Alternatives and Diversion (PAD) Initiative has become a national model for addressing quality-of-life concerns through community-based, non-police response.

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**In 2024, PAD successfully diverted 282 people from arrest, enrolled 291 people in care navigation, and received more than 1,800 calls for service through 311.**  
.....

Since 2017, PAD has diverted individuals from jail, connected them with care services, and partnered with the City of Atlanta and four local police departments: the Atlanta Police Department (APD), MARTA (Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority) Police Department, Georgia Tech University Police Department, and Georgia State University Police Department. In 2021, through contracting with PAD, Atlanta became the first U.S. city to dispatch non-police response teams via its 311 call system. Services include direct on-scene aid, connections to resources, and enrollment in case management and temporary shelter for eligible individuals.

In 2024, PAD successfully diverted 282 people from arrest, enrolled 291 people in care navigation, and received more than 1,800 calls for service through 311.

For decades, The Carter Center, under the leadership of former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, has supported the

human rights of all individuals and the improvement of access to care and support for people with mental illness and substance use disorders. To support the continued growth and institutionalization of alternatives like PAD, The Carter Center, through its Policy, Awareness, and Investment for Alternative Response and Decarceration (PAIReD) Project, partnered with PAD to assess public awareness and support for such services.

In January 2024, The Carter Center contracted the national polling firm TechnoMetrica Market Intelligence to survey 1,327 individuals in Atlanta and Fulton County to gauge the public's awareness, understanding, and support for alternative response models like PAD in their communities. The study explored attitudes toward quality-of-life issues, awareness of PAD and Atlanta 311, support for alternative response models, and preferred funding mechanisms.

Key findings include:

- **71% of respondents support unarmed alternative response**, and 76% support expanding such services.
- Only 18% were familiar with PAD, but **those who had used PAD reported a satisfaction rate of 73%**, on par with users of 311 (72%) and significantly higher than users of 911 (62%).
- **Respondents identified homelessness and mental health as the top community concerns**, and findings indicate a strong demand for compassionate, rehabilitative responses (71%).
- **Most respondents (64%) support using public funds** to sustain and expand alternative response services like PAD.

This report offers critical insights for decision makers, demonstrating public readiness to provide sustainable alternatives to policing for individuals in crisis at risk of arrest for issues related to homelessness and mental health concerns. The report outlines clear policy recommendations to institutionalize alternative response models, increase community awareness, and expand services, making the case for broader investment in such models across Fulton County.

3 Jacob Kang-Brown, Oliver Hinds, Jasmine Heiss, and Olive Lu, "The New Dynamics of Mass Incarceration," *Vera Institute of Justice*, June 2018, <https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/the-new-dynamics-of-mass-incarceration-report.pdf?dm=1568656252>.

4 Brennan Center for Justice, "U.S. Crime Rates and Trends—Analysis of FBI Crime Statistics," October 16, 2023, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/us-crime-rates-and-trends-analysis-fbi-crime-statistics>.

5 Prison Policy Initiative, "Mental Health," n.d., [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/mental\\_health/](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/mental_health/).

6 National Institute of Mental Health, "Mental Illness," n.d., <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>.



# Introduction

Since 1980, incarceration in the U.S. has increased by about 400%<sup>7</sup>, despite crime largely decreasing from the 1990s to the present.<sup>8</sup> Currently, taxpayers are footing an annual bill of more than \$80 billion<sup>9</sup>, and yet recidivism rates in the U.S. are as high as 83%.<sup>10</sup> An estimated one in six people in local jails and state and federal prisons are serving time for public order offenses,<sup>11</sup> generally defined as charges that violate societal norms, such as charges relating to homelessness or disorderly conduct. Over 40% of incarcerated individuals have been diagnosed with a mental health condition<sup>12</sup>—almost double that of the general population.<sup>13</sup>

As the human and financial costs of incarceration rise, alternative solutions are urgently needed in communities across the U.S. to address the needs of those struggling with mental health conditions, substance use concerns, and extreme poverty. For more than 10 years, activists and organizations in Atlanta have been developing ways to support and care for vulnerable members of their community.

PAD was created in response to decades of heavy reliance on the criminal legal system to manage social issues such as poverty, homelessness, mental health conditions, and substance use concerns. In 2013, a group of Atlanta activists began advocating for the decriminalization of a variety of public order offenses disproportionately impacting low-income individuals and people of color. In 2015, these activists formed a broad coalition to advocate for the creation of the Atlanta Fulton Pre-Arrest Diversion Design Team, which was authorized by the Atlanta City Council and Fulton County Board of Commissioners to begin planning diversion services. The resulting PAD Initiative, originally implemented in two police precincts, has since evolved into a citywide, nationally recognized model for community-based, non-police response to quality-of-life concerns.

PAD now operates in partnership with the Atlanta Police Department, MARTA Police Department, Georgia Tech University Police Department, and Georgia State University Police Department. In 2021, PAD began partnering with the City of Atlanta's 311 non-emergency services line to dispatch unarmed community response teams. This partnership made Atlanta the first city in the country to dispatch in-person response services through 311. Services include direct on-scene aid, connections to resources, and enrollment in case management and temporary shelter for eligible individuals. PAD also plays a vital role in diverting individuals from arrest and incarceration to appropriate care and support.

In 2023, The Carter Center began a formal partnership with PAD through the Center's PAIRed Project, which aims to advance community-driven, non-punitive approaches to public safety in Georgia. In December 2023, as a part of PAIRed, The Carter Center contracted TechnoMetrica Market Intelligence, a national polling and analytics firm with more than 30 years of experience, to assess public awareness, perceptions, and support for alternative response services like PAD in Atlanta and Fulton County. Through a competitive procurement process, TechnoMetrica was selected to design and implement a mixed-methodology public opinion research project.

Starting with desk research and tool development in January 2024, TechnoMetrica engaged individuals and stakeholders through online, telephone, and focus group surveys and interviews to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Between July and November 2024, The Carter Center, with TechnoMetrica's support, engaged 1,327 individuals in Atlanta and Fulton County. Quantitative data collection was completed in September 2024, followed by qualitative data collection in November 2024. The data was disaggregated by Atlanta's six policing zones (see Figure 1) and included perspectives from

7 Jacob Kang-Brown, Oliver Hinds, Jasmine Heiss, and Olive Lu, "The New Dynamics of Mass Incarceration," *Vera Institute of Justice*, June 2018, <https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/the-new-dynamics-of-mass-incarceration-report.pdf?dm=1568656252>.

8 Brennan Center for Justice, "U.S. Crime Rates and Trends—Analysis of FBI Crime Statistics," Oct. 16, 2023, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/us-crime-rates-and-trends-analysis-fbi-crime-statistics>.

9 Peter Wagner and Bernadette Rabuy, "Following the Money of Mass Incarceration," *Prison Policy Initiative*, Jan. 25, 2017, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/money.html>.

10 Of the individuals released from state prisons in 2005, 83% were rearrested within the nine years following their release. Mariel Alper, Matthew R. Durose, and Joshua Markman, "2018 Update on Prisoner Recidivism: A 9-Year Follow-up Period (2005-2014)," *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, May 2018, <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/18upr9yfup0514.pdf>.

11 Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner, "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2025," *Prison Policy Initiative*, March 11, 2025, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/pie2025.html>.

12 Prison Policy Initiative, "Mental Health," n.d., [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/mental\\_health/](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/research/mental_health/).

13 National Institute of Mental Health, "Mental Illness," n.d., <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>.



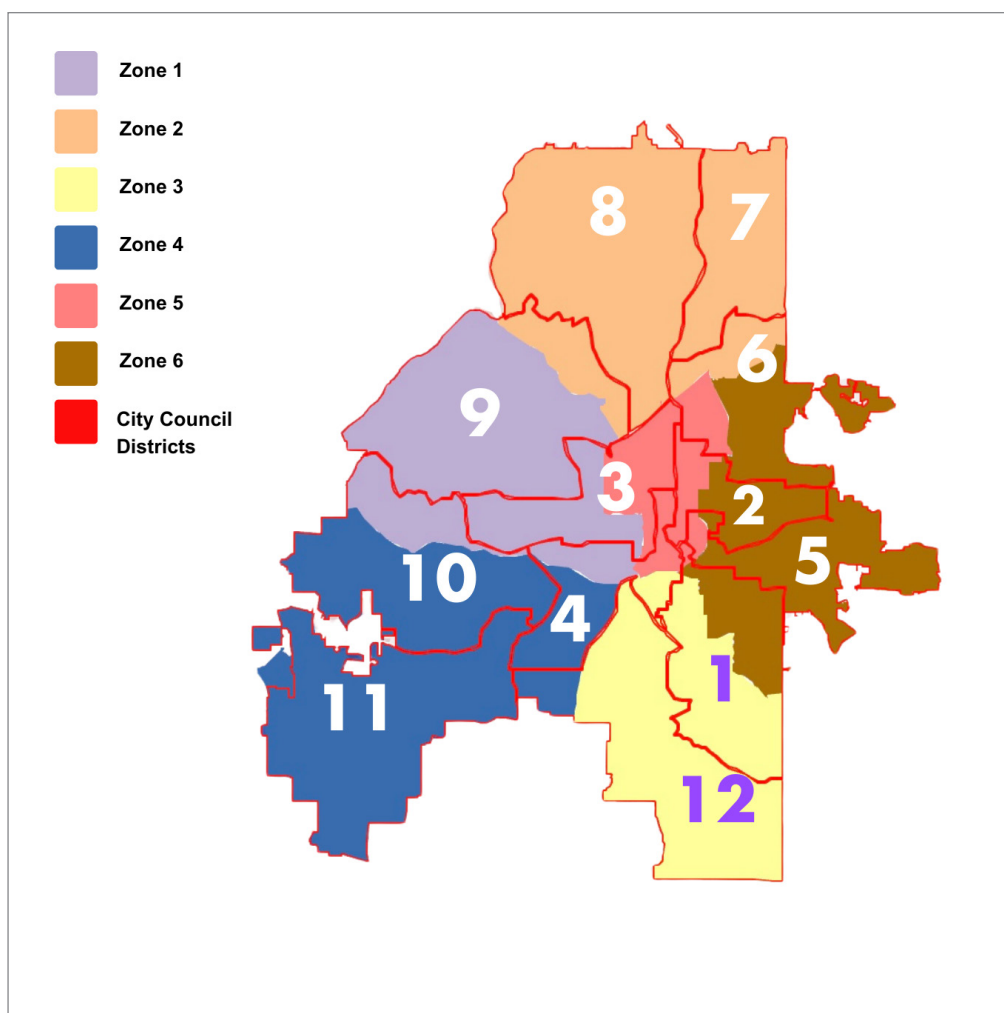
individuals with lived experience, service providers, neighborhood leaders, first responders, and the general public.

The study was designed to:

- Identify stakeholders' and community members' priorities and ability to access public services and resources.
- Understand the level of public awareness and satisfaction in accessing PAD's alternative response services.
- Gauge the level of support among the public, police, and policymakers for policing alternatives and pre-arrest diversion.

- Use data to develop policies to strengthen and expand the availability of policing alternatives.

This report is an analysis of the data gathered, as well as a discussion of public sentiment, key barriers, opportunities, and actionable policy recommendations. *As the field of alternative response continues to grow, this research offers critical insights into how Atlanta and other jurisdictions can build sustainable, community-centered solutions to some of the most pressing social challenges of our time.*



**Figure 1.** Map of Atlanta's Six Policing Zones and Atlanta's 12 City Council Districts

# Literature Review

In 2020, the Fulton County Superior Court launched the Familiar Faces study to identify individuals who frequently cycle through jails, shelters, medical centers, and other crisis services. Of the 100 “familiar faces” identified, 87 people experienced 3,603 arrests or field contacts with the APD from 2009 to 2020—an average of 41 arrests or contacts per person.<sup>14</sup> Also, a study of emergency services in the Grady Health System found 3,000 “super utilizers” between 2011 and 2013.<sup>15</sup> Like “familiar faces,” “super-utilizers” use emergency services frequently, typically for non-emergent medical needs, due to financial barriers or lack of access to basic care.

The overuse of health and legal resources in Atlanta and Fulton County is tied to the cyclical nature of extreme poverty and untreated mental health and substance use concerns. A 2023 report found that one in eight people booked in the Atlanta City Detention Center (ACDC)<sup>16</sup> were experiencing homelessness, and that 41% of the city jail population had outstanding fines averaging \$536.<sup>17</sup> For some, one fine or arrest can be a life-altering event that leads to a cycle of debt, poverty, and continued homelessness.<sup>18</sup>

An investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice into conditions at the Fulton County Jail revealed that an estimated 62% of those incarcerated in the facility have mental health and/or substance use issues. PAD intervenes in the cycle of arrest and incarceration of those with substance use and mental health conditions by providing housing assistance, long-term care navigation, food, and access to legal services.

Alongside the growing investment in alternative response at the local level, the state legislature passed Senate Bill 403, the Georgia Behavioral Health and Peace Officer Co-Responder Act, in 2022. SB 403 requires law enforcement agencies across the state to implement co-response programs through partnerships with behavioral health professionals. This bill is currently funding 10 co-response programs across Georgia for \$897,060, despite estimates by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) that the mandate would cost \$14,295,795 to fund in its entirety—about 1,594% more than what the Georgia General Assembly allocated.

In its first annual report on co-response,<sup>19</sup> DBHDD found that although workforce shortages and insufficient funding remained significant barriers, SB 403 was “fueling a remarkable shift in crisis management.” While co-response is a form of mental health response that is seeing investments across the U.S., one study—expanded upon below—has found that co-response models still see higher levels of incarceration, use of force, and hospital transports than alternative response models that do not involve the police.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, the state legislature passed SB 63,<sup>21</sup> which mandates that judges impose cash bail and effectively negates legislation that allowed judges to take a defendant’s ability to pay into consideration when setting bail.<sup>22</sup> This expansion of cash bail will result in many more Georgians being detained pretrial—in particular, Georgians experiencing poverty or housing insecurity and facing misdemeanor charges such as trespassing, failure

14 Fulton County Superior Court, *Familiar Faces: Snapshot of APD Data on Contacts with the 100 Familiar Faces*, Applied Research Services, June 2021, <https://www.fultonsuperiorcourtaga.gov/sites/default/files/Familiar%20Faces%20-%20APD%20Report%20-ARS%20-June%202021.pdf>.

15 *Super utilizers*, like *Familiar Faces*, are individuals who frequently use emergency services for non-urgent needs such as escaping the cold, primary care, or a place to sleep. Bell, J., S. Turbow, M. George, et al. 2017. “Factors Associated with High-Utilization in a Safety Net Setting.” *BMC Health Services Research* 17: 273. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-017-2209-0>.

16 In 2019, Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms signed legislation to close the Atlanta City Detention Center. Despite this legislation, the detention center remains open and operational.

17 These fines were preventing individuals from being released from confinement. Incarceration, for any period, can result in unemployment, loss of housing, and reduced educational opportunities. See Prison Policy Initiative, “Unhoused and Under Arrest: How Atlanta Polices Poverty,” June 8, 2023, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/06/08/atlanta-poverty/>.

18 Ray Khalfani, “Regressive Revenue Perpetuates Poverty: Why Georgia’s Fines and Fees Need Immediate Reform,” *Georgia Budget and Policy Institute*, Dec. 6, 2022, <https://gbpi.org/regressive-revenue-perpetuates-poverty-why-georgias-fines-and-fees-need-immediate-reform/>.

19 Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Co-Responder Annual Report, January 2024, <https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/organization/be-informed/reports-performance/co-responder-annual-report>.

20 Matthew Bakko, Leonard Swanson, Catherine Zettner, Kaitlyn Kok, Hosanna Fukuzawa, and Sheryl Kubiak, “A Comparison of Behavioral Health Crisis Response Models in Meeting Behavioral Health Goals and Improving Criminal Legal Diversion,” *Community Mental Health Journal* 61, No. 5 (2025): 1072-1082, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10597-024-01447-4>.

21 SB63 adds 30 new offenses to the existing list of 24 offenses for which cash bail is mandated. Georgia General Assembly - SB 63

22 Georgia Senate Bill 407, 2017-2018 Regular Session, <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/52661>.

to appear, or possession of marijuana<sup>23</sup>. These offenses are eligible for diversion to alternative, non-punitive services.

In response to the growing need for non-punitive services, various models of crisis response have been established and implemented across the U.S., including:

- Co-response, a response model that partners a law enforcement officer and a behavioral health specialist or other non-police professional to respond to mental health crises, is now embedded in 232 agencies across the U.S. Almost half of these programs started in 2020.<sup>24</sup>
- Mobile crisis response is a model embedded in clinical and mental health systems that provides services outside of hospitals and inpatient treatment facilities. NRI Inc. has identified 1,820 mobile crisis response units across 50 states.<sup>25</sup>
- Alternative response models differ from the above models in that they do not include the presence of law enforcement and often do not include clinical staff. Alternative response models typically provide on-scene outreach to de-escalate situations, meet the basic needs of those in need, and offer pathways to community-based resources. The responses can range from housing vouchers to long-term care navigation and the provision of items such as food or hygiene goods.

In a 2025 study of crisis response models published in the *Community Mental Health Journal*, mobile and office-based<sup>26</sup> responses were more likely than co-response models to (1) resolve crises informally, (2) connect individuals with services, and (3) provide follow-up services. Further, mobile and office-based responses were less likely than co-response models to arrest those in need, transport them to the hospital, or use force when engaging with those in need.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, the presence of a law enforcement officer, regardless of the officer's potential

status as a co-responder, correlates significantly with increased arrests and hospital transports. It also correlates with fewer services being provided and a low probability of follow-up with the individual in need of services.

Alternative response models have become an increasingly common investment for municipalities. As of 2024, there are more than 100 community response models across the U.S.<sup>28</sup> Despite the tremendous growth in the number of alternative response teams, awareness of these resources remains low.

Academic literature on alternative response models remains relatively scant, especially on public opinion toward alternative response models. While there is a lack of broad, comprehensive polling, a handful of organizations across the U.S. (see footnotes) have conducted surveys either with smaller sample sizes or solely focused on their constituents. These surveys illustrate a general picture of public opinion toward alternative response models, but the localized samples in the studies' research design limit how much the findings can be generalized.<sup>29</sup>

Existing data, though limited, does allow us to discern interest in and support for alternative response models. In 2023, The Tarrance Group, a Republican strategic research and polling firm,<sup>30</sup> found that 73% of registered voters in Michigan, Minnesota, and Illinois support investing in alternative and co-response models, with strong preferences for alternative response to situations such as drug overdoses, mental health concerns, nonviolent medical emergencies, and poverty-related instances such as individuals sleeping in their cars.<sup>31</sup>

Also in 2023, The Movement 4 Black Lives found that 86% of Black Americans support an alternative to police that was focused on mental health concerns and de-escalating violence.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, a 2023 survey from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) found that 85% of surveyed individuals prefer a professional

23 Southern Center for Human Rights, "Georgia Senate Passes Regressive Bill Targeting Cash Bail and Community Support," Feb. 1, 2024, <https://www.schr.org/georgia-senate-passes-regressive-bill-targeting-cash-bail-and-community-support/>.

24 Crime and Justice Research Alliance, "Study of U.S. Law Enforcement Co-Responder Programs Identifies Wide Variations," *Phys.org*, Nov. 14, 2024, <https://phys.org/news/2024-11-law-wide-variations.html>.

25 National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NRI), *Profiles of Mobile Crisis Teams (MCTs) 2023*, July 2024, <https://nri-inc.org/media/m4sgp1mp/profiles-mobile-crisis-teams-2023.pdf>.

26 Office-based, according to this study, is defined as services that act as alternatives to hospital or law-enforcement-centric services.

27 Matthew Bakko, Leonard Swanson, Catherine Zettner, Kaitlyn Kok, Hosanna Fukuzawa, and Sheryl Kubiak, "A Comparison of Behavioral Health Crisis Response Models in Meeting Behavioral Health Goals and Improving Criminal Legal Diversion," *Community Mental Health Journal* 61, No. 5 (2025): 1072-1082, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10597-024-01447-4>.

28 Directory of Alternative Crisis Response Programs, 2024

29 PAD's 2021 survey notes in the methodology that it used a convenience sample and that some populations were overrepresented. The Joyce Foundation only surveyed individuals living in the Midwest region of the U.S. (Michigan, Minnesota, and Illinois), which is not geographically representative, so the survey results cannot, therefore, indicate a solid conclusion for U.S. opinion toward alternative response models. The Movement 4 Black Lives study specifically surveyed Black Americans, which is not representative of the racial makeup of the U.S.

30 The Tarrance Group, <https://www.tarrance.com/>

31 Lake Research Partners and The Tarrance Group, *Beyond Traditional Policing: Public Support for Co-Responder and Alternative Responder Models*, Joyce Foundation, April 2023, <https://assets.joycefdn.org/content/uploads/LRP-Joyce-Foundation-Deckqw.pdf>.

32 Movement 4 Black Lives, *Perspectives on Community Safety From Black America*, December 2023, <https://m4bl.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Perspectives-on-Community-Safety-From-Black-America.pdf>.

responding to mental health, drug, or suicide crises rather than police.<sup>33</sup>

Despite some evidence of support for alternative response models, many community response organizations struggle with awareness of their programs and services. A 2020 report from the Vera Institute of Justice notes that a barrier to the awareness and utilization of alternative response models is overreliance on police, especially for non-emergency instances.<sup>34</sup>

Misconceptions about crime and crime response are another obstacle to the expansion and institutionalization of alternative response models. Public opinion can lean toward supporting co-response models rather than alternative models for two primary reasons:

- The desire to protect the unarmed civilians and specialists responding to the calls.
- A broad and sometimes misinformed understanding of the role of police within a community.

While available research does not deeply engage with the safety of unarmed specialists, one study from an alternative response unit in Eugene, Oregon, found that police backup has been requested for less than 2% of their 24,000 annual calls.<sup>35</sup> This is a helpful insight to understand the safety of unarmed social service and

mental health specialists responding to calls previously handled by police. However, more research is needed to confirm whether this finding is consistent across alternative response units operating throughout the U.S.

Public confusion about the role of police is apparent in both 911 call patterns and unrealistic expectations around crime prevention. Police officers often find themselves responding to animal control, mental health issues, homelessness, traffic concerns, and noise complaints, among a broad range of emergent, life-threatening calls and non-emergent calls. To offset these burdens and to better route calls to their appropriate responses and departments, many cities adopted 311 non-emergency lines. This initiative has seen great success in a variety of cities,<sup>36</sup> but there is still a pervasive overreliance on police for issues that don't necessarily warrant a law enforcement response.<sup>37</sup>

A primary example of this phenomenon is homelessness and the dependence on police to address those living in public spaces like parks, streets, and other infrastructures. Calling on police to respond to social issues introduces criminalization as a justified response. Law enforcement's primary role is to respond to crime, so it is logical that their most likely tools would be arrest, incarceration, fines, or transport to an emergency room, but in many cases, an alternative response may be the more efficient and effective option.

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33 National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), *988 One-Year Anniversary Survey Topline 2023*, conducted by Ipsos, June 2-11, 2023, <https://www.nami.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/NAMI-988-One-Year-Anniversary-Survey-Topline-2023.pdf>.

34 Vera Institute of Justice, *Behavioral Health Crisis Alternatives*, November 2020, <https://www.vera.org/behavioral-health-crisis-alternatives>.

35 Vera Institute of Justice, *Case Study: CAHOOTS*, November 2020, <https://www.vera.org/behavioral-health-crisis-alternatives/cahoots>.

36 Wen-Nung Wu, "Determinants of Citizen-Generated Data in a Smart City," *Journal of Urban Management* 9, No. 1 (2020): 1-10, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341096771\\_Determinants\\_of\\_citizen-generated\\_data\\_in\\_a\\_smart\\_city\\_Analysis\\_of\\_311\\_system\\_user\\_behavior](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341096771_Determinants_of_citizen-generated_data_in_a_smart_city_Analysis_of_311_system_user_behavior).

37 S. Rebecca Neusteter, Maris Mapolski, Mawia Khogali, and Megan O'Toole, *The 911 Call Processing System: A Review of the Literature as It Relates to Policing* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, July 2019), <https://vera-institute.files.svdcn.com/production/downloads/publications/911-call-processing-system-review-of-policing-literature.pdf>.

# Methodology

In August 2023, The Carter Center released a request for proposals for polling to gauge the public’s awareness, understanding, and support for policing alternatives/ alternative response in Atlanta and Fulton County. By early 2024, the Center contracted TechnoMetrica to facilitate stakeholder meetings, conduct a survey, and coordinate focus groups.

The Carter Center and TechnoMetrica first engaged staff at PAD and Atlanta 311 to develop foundational insights around policing alternatives and awareness of these services in Atlanta. Atlanta 311 provides the public with access to all of the city’s government services, including garbage, water, and traffic signal repair requests, alongside receiving referrals from community members concerning individuals needing assistance with mental health, substance use, or poverty issues.

The Carter Center, with support from TechnoMetrica, also formed a multi-stakeholder advisory committee, comprising key external stakeholders representing the following groups:

- Individuals with lived experience<sup>38</sup>
- Representatives from a wide array of neighborhood public safety organizations, regional organizations that serve disability communities
- Organizations that serve at-risk children and youth
- Law enforcement and first responders
- Policy, advocacy, and academia professionals

The advisory committee supported the survey design and offered technical assistance throughout the duration of the project.

Following an iterative process of survey tool review and refinement, with support from the advisory committee, TechnoMetrica launched the final online survey in July 2024 and the telephone survey in September 2024. Using online and telephone surveys as a multi-method approach to gauge public opinion ensured a robust, representative sample of 1,327 people. The telephone survey included oversampling to enable valid subgroup analysis by APD policing zone. All 1,327 individuals surveyed lived in either Atlanta or Fulton County (see Table 1 for demographic breakdown). The surveys were identical across methods and were offered in both English and Spanish (attached as Annexes A and B). TechnoMetrica generated the online survey via a panel of online service providers, garnering 926 responses. Via TechnoMetrica’s in-house call center, the team then conducted the telephone survey with 401 people, using both cell and landline samples procured from a commercial list broker. TechnoMetrica combined the data from both survey methods and weighted it by gender, age, race, and ethnicity to ensure a study sample representative of Atlanta and Fulton County demographics. The margin of error was +/- 2.96 percentage points.

TechnoMetrica then cleaned the preliminary quantitative findings and presented them to The Carter Center, PAD, and the advisory committee, gathering inputs for the development of community focus group interview

**Table 1.** Profile of Respondents to Online and Telephone Surveys

Age	Overall	Race	Overall	Gender	Overall	Hispanic Origin	Overall
18-24	13%	White	38%	Male	49%	Yes	7%
25-34	18%	Black	44%	Female	51%	No	92%
35-44	24%	Asian	7%	Trans male	0.2%		
45-54	17%	Native American	2%	Trans female	0.1%		
55-64	13%	Multi-racial	5%	Nonbinary	0.1%		
65+	16%	Other	4%				

<sup>38</sup> Individuals with lived experience represent those who have lived with or currently live with mental health, substance use, or poverty concerns.

questions to collect more detailed information to fill gaps in the data. The polling firm aimed to understand community awareness, perceptions, and potential support for PAD and similar services addressing non-emergency quality-of-life concerns related to substance use concerns, mental health conditions, homelessness, and poverty (see Annex C).

The objectives of the focus groups were to:

- **Assess awareness** – determining baseline familiarity with PAD and alternative response teams.
- **Gauge support** – measuring initial and contextual support for PAD’s approach to quality-of-life issues.
- **Clarify wording preferences** – identifying terminology that participants are most comfortable using when discussing sensitive social issues.

The community focus groups were divided into four geographic regions: North Fulton, North Atlanta, South Atlanta, and South Fulton, and included a total of 35 respondents drawn from online and telephone surveys. Respondents to the surveys were incentivized to join the focus groups with a \$50 gift card and were entered for a chance to win an additional \$100 gift card.

Throughout quantitative and qualitative data collection, The Carter Center included questions to test messaging and measure respondents’ attitudes toward various outreach modalities. The findings from communications-related

questions helped inform the PAIReD Project’s efforts to increase awareness and use of PAD and have not been included in this report.

## Types of Data and Frameworks

TechnoMetrica collected primary data obtained via surveys of Atlanta and Fulton County community members. The quantitative assessment used an attitudinal framework that employed a five-point Likert scale,<sup>39</sup> closed questions, and multiple-choice questions.

Via qualitative focus groups, TechnoMetrica collected primary data obtained from virtual and in-person group interviews with individuals in Atlanta and Fulton County. TechnoMetrica analyzed transcripts from the focus groups to identify main themes and takeaways.

## Research Questions

The guiding research questions for the study included:

- How do people generally feel about quality-of-life issues, and what is the appropriate response to these issues?
- Are people aware of PAD, and how did they become aware of PAD?
- How do awareness and use of PAD differ among Atlanta policing zones?

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<sup>39</sup> A Likert scale is a rating system used in questionnaires that is designed to measure people’s attitudes and preferences. Jamieson, S. “Likert scale.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 11, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Likert-Scale>



# Findings

A total of 1,327 people responded to the quantitative survey, including 622 based in Atlanta and 705 based outside of Atlanta but inside Fulton County. After the survey, respondents were encouraged to participate in a focus group at a later date. In total, 35 respondents volunteered to participate in a focus group and expand on their answers from the survey.

.....

**Alternative response is a non-police first responder program that provides an alternative to traditional first response, especially law enforcement.**

.....

Questions focused on respondents' perceptions of quality-of-life concerns, their awareness and views of alternative response models like PAD, their preferred funding approaches for these services, and their expectations for the role of police versus specialized responders. All questions were designed to gauge public support, identify gaps in awareness, and reveal how community priorities align with policy and program development for non-police crisis response.

Among the key insights from the quantitative findings:

- Generally, respondents were unaware of PAD's services, but those who were aware expressed a strong favorability.
- Respondents expressed a strong preference for alternative response to quality-of-life issues such as mental health conditions, homelessness, and extreme poverty.
- Respondents demonstrated strong support for expanding policing alternatives and a preference for funding such services from public or taxpayer dollars.

## Quantitative Findings

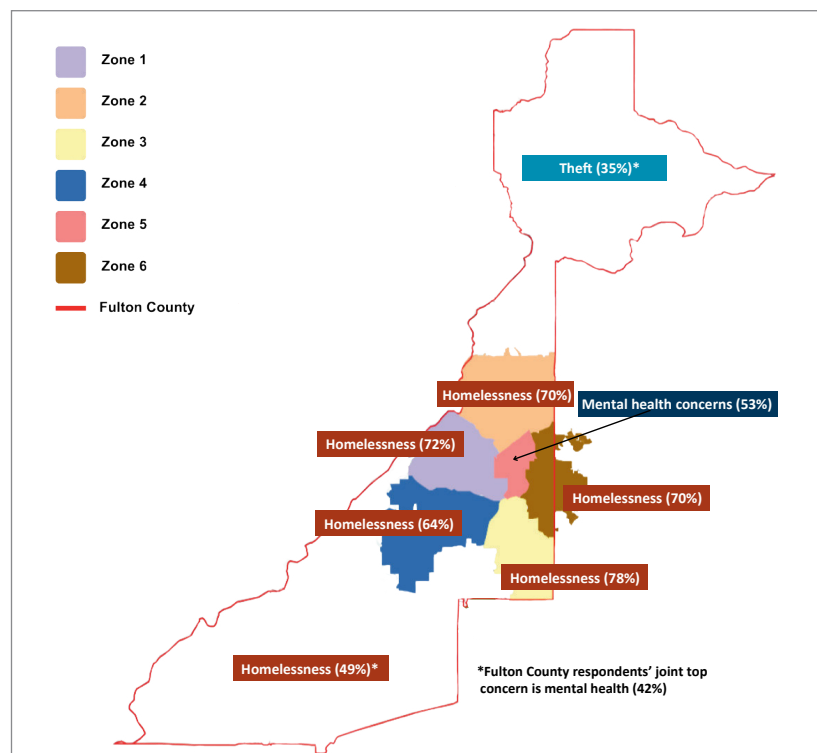
### Community Profile and Support for Alternative Response

Respondents were asked about quality-of-life concerns—defined as struggles with mental health, substance use, or poverty—in their community to establish a baseline understanding. Respondents

were given 10 options and asked to check all that applied. As seen in the ranked list below, homelessness, mental health concerns, and theft were the top concerns.

- Homelessness (52%)
- Mental health concerns (51%)
- Theft (48%)
- Someone asking for food or money (35%)
- Public intoxication or drug use (31%)
- Someone selling drugs or sex (30%)
- Disturbances or disruptions (27%)
- Trespassing (26%)
- Other (13%)
- None (12%)

The bulk of respondents (88%) reported at least one quality-of-life concern in their community. The responses also were divided and organized according to geographical location, as seen in Figure 2. Homelessness was the top



**Figure 2.** Map of Key Concerns in the City of Atlanta and Fulton County



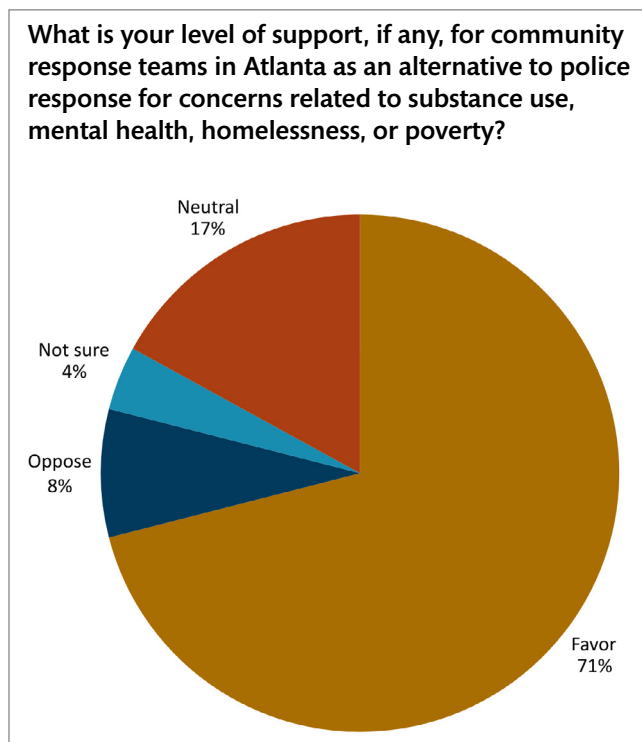
concern for every zone except downtown Atlanta (Zone 5) and Fulton County (outside of Atlanta city limits), in which respondents cited mental health concerns as the most pressing issue in their community.<sup>40</sup>

While homelessness was the most pressing community concern among Atlanta respondents (67% across the six policing zones), Fulton County respondents' top concern was mental health (42%). When the data was disaggregated between North Fulton and South Fulton, theft (35%) and homelessness (49%) stood out as the top community concerns, respectively.

### Support for Alternative Response

Despite only 44% of respondents having been familiar with the concept of alternative response before this survey—defined in the study as “community response by unarmed specialists, rather than police, to incidents that do not involve weapons”—71% favored alternative response models, as seen in Figure 3.

Support for policing alternatives was higher inside Atlanta than in Fulton County due to a higher percentage of Fulton County respondents (6%) marking “not sure” for questions about alternative response models. Within Fulton County, support for alternative response was higher in North Fulton (74%) than in South Fulton (66%).



**Figure 3. Support for Community Response Teams**

Notably, within Atlanta, support for alternative response was highest in Zones 5 (78%) and 6 (79%), where the PAD pilot was initiated, suggesting a strong likelihood for growth in support as people become more aware of PAD and its services. Support was lowest in Zone 3 (64%), evidenced by a high number of respondents marking neutral (19%) or not sure (5%).

Support for alternative response models is often higher for older generations than for younger generations. Respondents ages 65 and older express the highest levels of support at 81%. The lowest level of support is among respondents ages 18-24 (48%).

The youngest age demographic surveyed has slightly elevated rates of opposition to alternative response compared with all other age groups. The low levels of support seen here and throughout this age group's responses are reflected in the high numbers of “neutral” or “not sure” choice selections. For instance, 33% of respondents ages 18-24 selected the neutral option when asked about their support for an alternative response. The increase in respondents choosing “neutral” or “not sure” diluted the levels of support compared with other age groups, who were less likely to select neutral.<sup>41</sup>

.....  
**Seventy-one percent of respondents expressed support for alternative response models.**  
 .....

### Support for Expanding Alternative Response Services

To better understand general support for expanding existing alternative response services in Atlanta and Fulton County, respondents were asked, “Do you support or oppose expanding the availability of alternative response services like PAD for non-emergency quality-of-life concerns related to mental health, substance use, homelessness, or poverty?”

Respondents answered favorably, with support for expanding alternative response services at 76%, as seen in Figure 4. Support for expanding alternative response services in Atlanta was highest in Zone 2 (85%) and Zone 6 (82%). Within Fulton County, support was nearly identical between North Fulton (75%) and South Fulton (76%).

Atlanta's average level of support across all policing zones sits at about 79%, whereas Fulton County is at about 76%. Though a very minor difference, it may be attributed to the lack of familiarity with alternative response services that exist between Atlanta and Fulton County, as PAD's

<sup>40</sup> Aggregated Fulton County data displays mental health as the top concern. Data disaggregated between North and South Fulton demonstrate different key concerns for both jurisdictions.

<sup>41</sup> All age groups older than 24 averaged 15% for “neutral” and 3% for “not sure.” Respondents ages 18-24 were nearly twice as likely as every other age group to choose “neutral” or “not sure.”

services and outreach have been conducted solely in Atlanta as of the writing of this report.

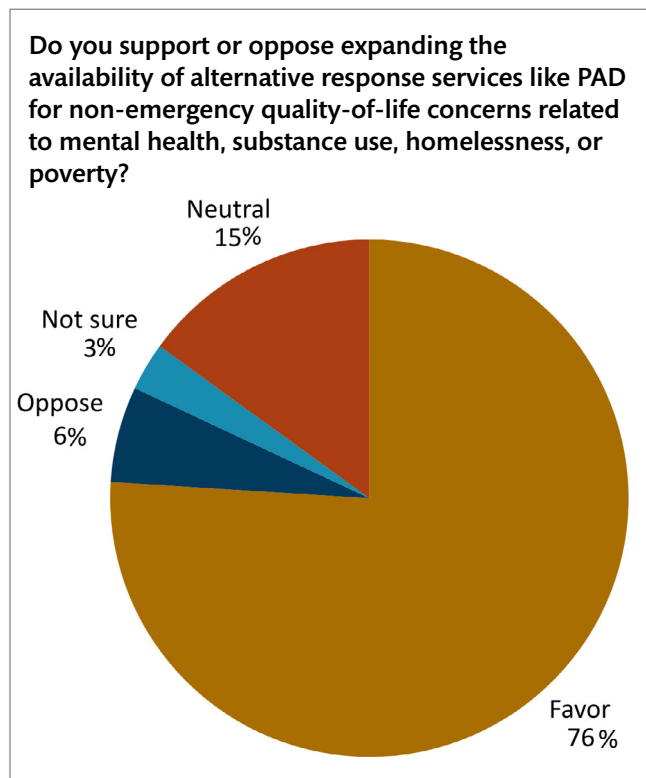
Support was highest among college graduates (80%), high-income earners or those making more than \$200,000 per year (85%), and respondents ages 55-64 (85%), compared with those with a high school

diploma (58%), those making less than \$30,000 per year (65%), and respondents ages 18-24 (53%), as seen in Figure 5. Opposition to the expansion of alternative response services was the highest (12%) among respondents ages 18-24, about double the average between the rest of the age groups (6%).

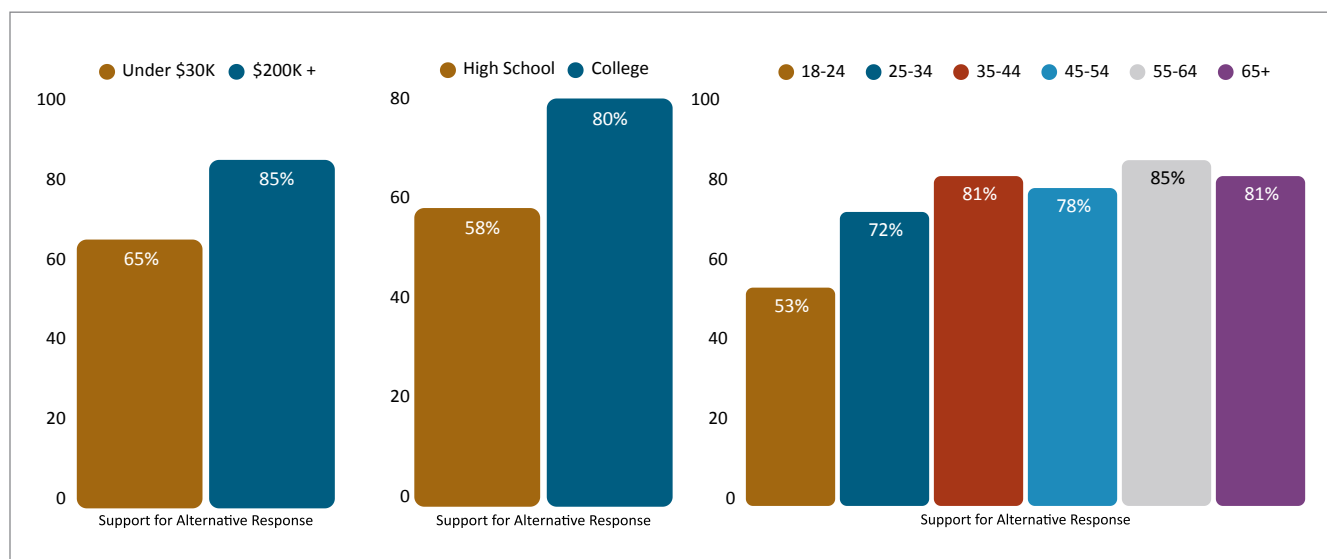
Following previous trends, about one-third of respondents ages 18-24 responded “neutral” to the question of expanding alternative response models. However, this explanation does not fully capture the elevated objection to alternative response models that the younger respondents expressed. There is little public opinion polling of individuals ages 18-24 (Gen Z) regarding alternative response models. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether these findings diverge from empirical scholarship.

### Funding

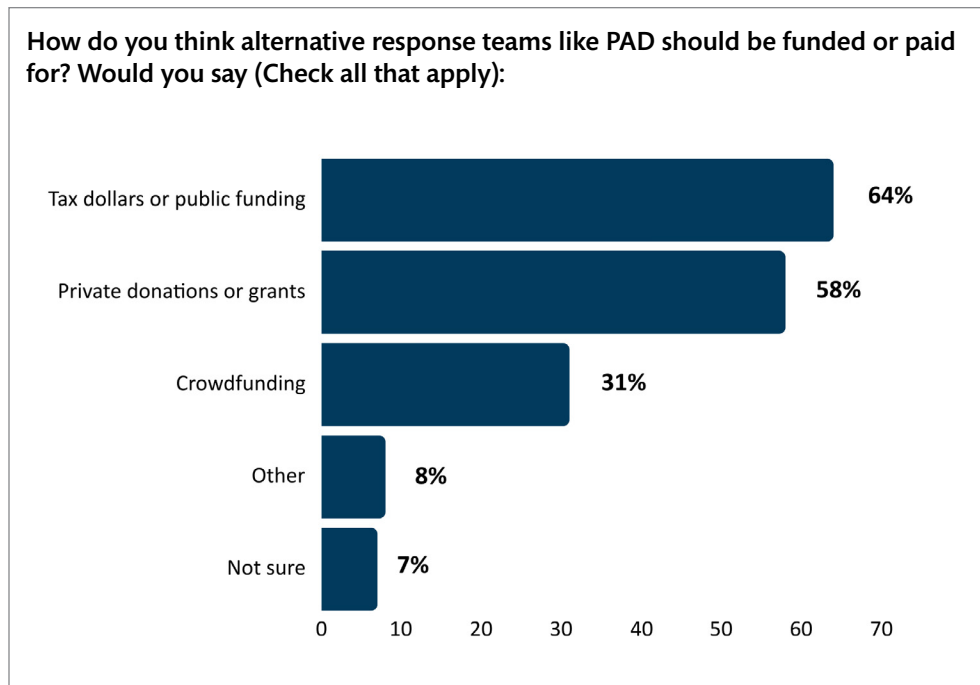
In addition to their thoughts about expanding alternative response models, respondents were asked about how these proposed expansions should be funded. For instance, respondents were asked, “How do you think alternative response teams like PAD should be funded or paid for?” To fund alternative response programs, respondents preferred tax dollars or public funding (64%), followed by private donations or grants (58%). Nearly one in three respondents (31%) noted crowdfunding as a preferred source (see Figure 6). Respondents generally favored a mix of funding resources, believing that alternative response models should be a public resource while also expressing concern that politics could interfere with vital resources.



**Figure 4.** Interest in Expanding Alternative Response Services



**Figure 5.** Demographic Comparisons of Support for Expanding Alternative Response Models in Atlanta and Fulton County



**Figure 6. Funding Preferences for Alternative Response Teams**

### Role of Alternative Response

As seen in Figure 7, a majority of respondents prefer an alternative response for the community concerns they deem most urgent: homelessness (67%) and mental health (62%). For homelessness, alternative response services were slightly more popular in Atlanta (70%) than in Fulton County (67%). Alternative response services for homelessness were most popular in Zone 6 (77%) and Zone 3 (75%). There was no significant difference between North Fulton and South Fulton.

Support for the use of alternative response services for mental health concerns trended similarly among geographic locations as homelessness did. Overall, support in Atlanta was slightly higher (64%) than in Fulton County (61%). Support was highest in Zone 6 (77%) and Zone 1 (69%).

The data suggests that respondents favor the use of alternative response services for situations in which there is no threat of violence. For any situation that generates

a perception of violence, respondents generally express a preference for the police. For instance, criminal trespassing is one of the charges most frequently diverted to PAD, representing 66% of diversions in September 2024<sup>42</sup> and 73% of diversions in October 2024.<sup>43</sup> Trespassing charges are prevalent for those experiencing extreme poverty in the U.S. because of laws that prohibit sleeping in public parks,<sup>44</sup> panhandling in zoned areas,<sup>45</sup> or sleeping near business entrances.<sup>46</sup> Because trespassing is the primary legal component for charges such as breaking and entering or burglary,<sup>47</sup> it is possible that people have conflated trespassing with more serious criminal acts. However, those experiencing homelessness will most certainly incur criminal trespassing charges when sleeping in or inhabiting large swaths of a city is illegal.<sup>48</sup>

When respondents were asked to identify the role of police in substance use, mental health, and poverty concerns, almost seven in 10 (69%) disfavored police assuming the role of primary responder, despite this historically being the status quo nationwide.

<sup>42</sup> PAD, *September 2024 Report – Corrected Diversions*, Oct. 17, 2024, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6679d89a8633a045155e4e25/t/671a91d33975d320de718401/1729794519810/10.17+September+2024+Report++corrected+diversions.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Policing Alternatives and Diversion (PAD) Initiative, *October 2024 Report – Corrected Diversions*, October 2024, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6679d89a8633a045155e4e25/t/673b70959dc73b1e74db137f/1731948697190/PAD\\_CoA\\_Fulton\\_Co\\_2024\\_October+%281%29.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6679d89a8633a045155e4e25/t/673b70959dc73b1e74db137f/1731948697190/PAD_CoA_Fulton_Co_2024_October+%281%29.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> City of Atlanta, *Code of Ordinances*, § 110-60, [https://library.municode.com/ga/atlanta/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=COORATGEVOII\\_CH110PARE\\_ARTIIIPARU\\_DIV1GE\\_S110-60USPUPANI](https://library.municode.com/ga/atlanta/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COORATGEVOII_CH110PARE_ARTIIIPARU_DIV1GE_S110-60USPUPANI).

<sup>45</sup> City of Atlanta, *Code of Ordinances*, § 106-85, <https://atlanta.elaws.us/code/coor.ptii.ch106.artiii.sec106-85>.

<sup>46</sup> Georgia Code § 16-7-21 (2024), “Criminal Trespass,” <https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/2022/title-16/chapter-7/article-2/part-1/section-16-7-21/>.

<sup>47</sup> Legal Information Institute Cornell Law School, *Breaking and Entering*, n.d., [https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/breaking\\_and\\_entering](https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/breaking_and_entering).

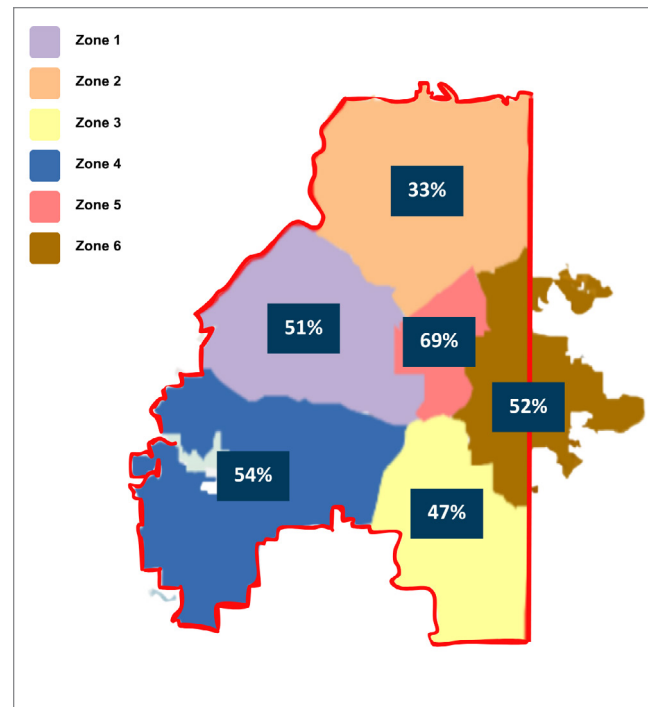
<sup>48</sup> Luci Harrell and Brian Nam-Sonenstein, “Unhoused and Under Arrest: How Atlanta Polices Poverty,” *Prison Policy Initiative*, June 8, 2023, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2023/06/08/atlanta-poverty/>.

## Awareness of PAD and Strategic Insights

In January 2021, Atlanta 311 began receiving calls for PAD in select policing zones. In the summer of 2021, these services expanded citywide. The staggered launch of PAD throughout Atlanta could explain the varying levels of awareness of alternative response as a concept, PAD, and Atlanta 311.

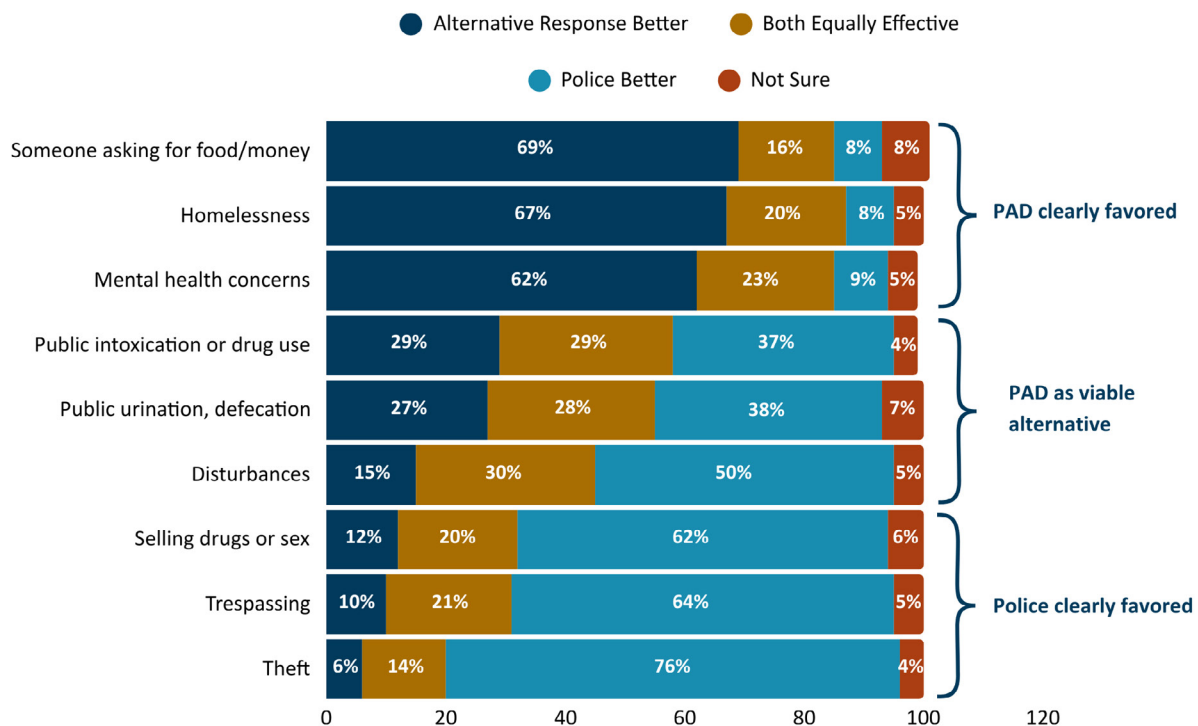
Respondents were asked, “How familiar are you with alternative first response or community response as an alternative to policing for certain types of incidents?” As seen in Figure 8, those most familiar with the concept of alternative response models were in Zone 5 (69%), where PAD started. Respondents were least aware of the concept of alternative response models in Zone 2 (33%), which is notably lower than in Fulton County (38%). Between North and South Fulton, familiarity varied by nine points, with respondents in South Fulton (38%) significantly more aware of the concept of alternative response than those in North Fulton (29%).

Nearly half (48%) of respondents were markedly more aware of 311 as an option for quality-of-life concerns than they were of PAD specifically (18%). The variances could be due to different marketing resources available



**Figure 8.** Awareness of Alternative Response (By Police Zone)

**In general, for each of the following, do you think an alternative response service like PAD or a police response would be more effective in resolving the situation while minimizing harm to all involved?**



**Figure 7.** Preference for Alternative Response Teams vs. Police by Situation

to PAD and the City of Atlanta, or the disparate duration of operations of Atlanta 311 and PAD.<sup>49</sup>

Respondents are more likely to hear about PAD through traditional sources such as the news and social media. The data reveal that Atlanta 311's paid advertising reaches more individuals (21% of survey respondents) than PAD's paid advertising (14% of respondents), which is potentially due to dissimilar resource accessibility between a government entity and a nonprofit organization. In addition to access to more resources, Atlanta 311 also has the benefit of existing as a government institution, meaning it does not face the same challenges with funding that a nonprofit might. The distinctive success of word-of-mouth marketing for Atlanta 311 exemplifies the weight of longevity as a factor contributing to the levels of awareness for an organization or service.

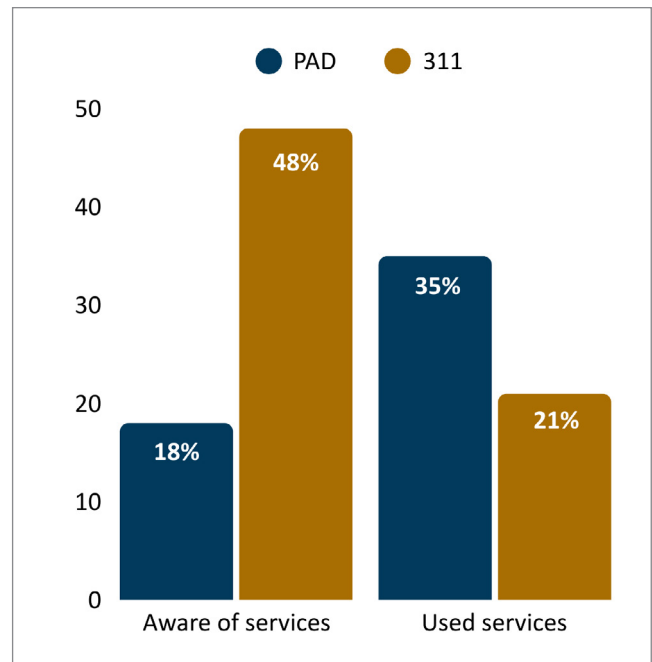
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**The Carter Center is supporting the development and dissemination of digital ads via social media to help increase awareness and use of PAD's services.**

.....

A unique discrepancy among one of the younger age groups (25-34) is that they report distinctly high rates of having never heard of PAD (80% compared with an average of 73% across all other age groups) while simultaneously being among the most frequent users of PAD's services.<sup>50</sup> Among this age group, despite generally low levels of awareness, those who became aware were highly likely to engage with PAD by calling 311 or PAD directly, usually for mental health concerns seen in the community (40% of respondents ages 25-34 had called PAD for mental health concerns). This trend is visible to varying degrees across most age demographics: Those who are aware of PAD's services are likely to use them (Figure 9).<sup>51</sup>

This distinction is underscored when compared with Atlanta 311. While Atlanta 311 has significantly higher rates of awareness among respondents, those aware of Atlanta 311's services were significantly less likely to use its services than PAD's services, as reflected in Figure 9. The contrasting nature of the respondents' use of these two resources cannot be determined to a certain extent but could be partially explained by PAD and Atlanta 311's partnership. Individuals can be directed to PAD's services despite having never heard of PAD due to Atlanta 311's role as a dispatcher to PAD.



**Figure 9.** Respondents' Awareness and Usage of Atlanta 311 and PAD

Of the respondents who were aware of PAD, 10% learned about the service while calling Atlanta 311 to request assistance for a community concern such as homelessness, mental health conditions, or substance use. Respondents' being directed to PAD via Atlanta 311 strengthens the empirical relationship between awareness of PAD and usage of PAD, but it does not fully explain how the relationship between these two factors is more significant for PAD than for Atlanta 311.

Respondents' use of PAD's services reiterates a key barrier for alternative response services in the City of Atlanta: lack of awareness. Even with low levels of awareness across a large subset of a demographic, any level of awareness within a group indicates a strong likelihood of having used PAD's services.

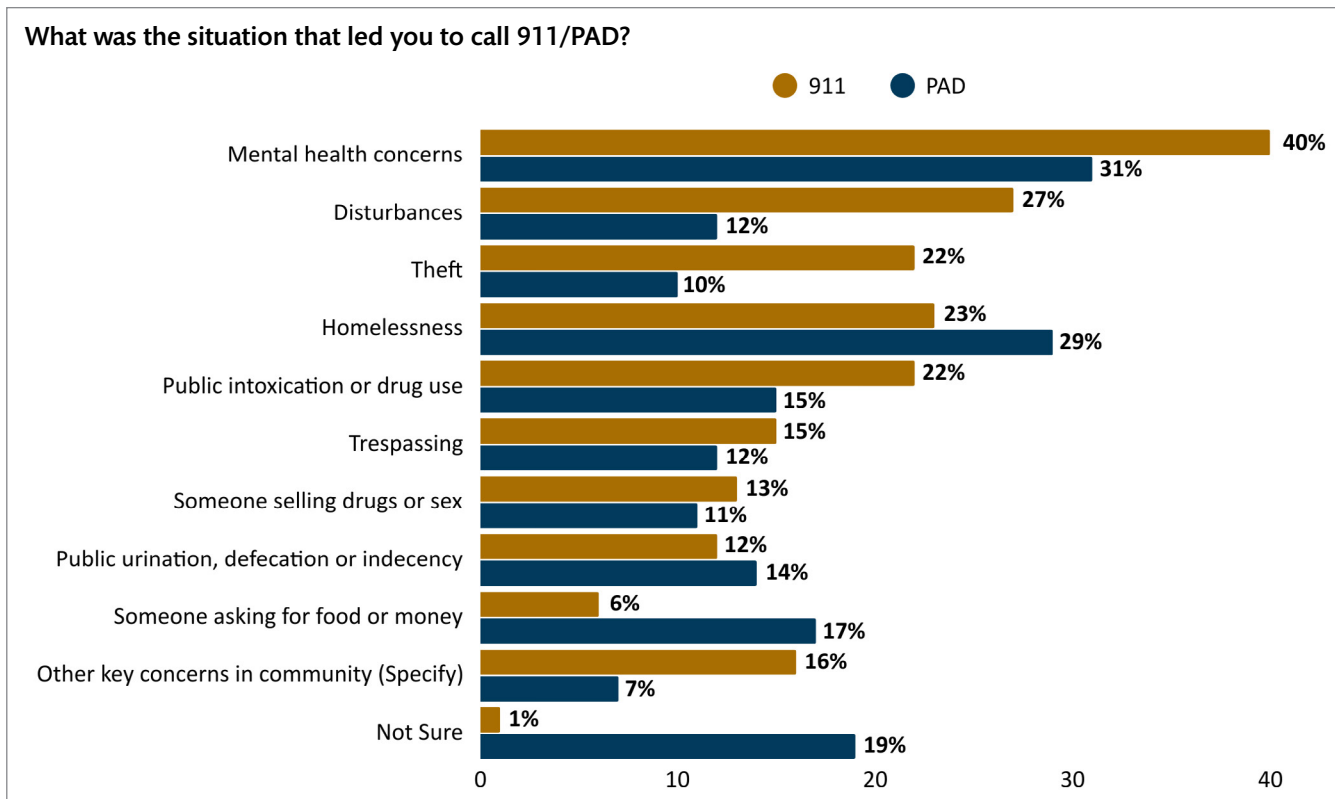
Among those most aware of PAD—ages 18-24 and 35-44—they typically heard of PAD through social media (59% and 43%, respectively). Older demographics are more likely to have heard of PAD through the news. These results indicate that employing a variety of digital media sources is necessary to improve awareness of alternative response services.

<sup>49</sup> Atlanta 311 has been in full operation since 2014. PAD initiated co-creation sessions and coalition building in 2013 but did not start accepting diversions until 2017. It was not until 2021 that PAD's services expanded citywide. This accounts for about a seven-year gap between the organizations.

<sup>50</sup> Of those ages 25-34 who have heard of PAD (12%), 48% had interacted with PAD in some capacity.

<sup>51</sup> The exception here is ages 65 and older, who, although supportive of PAD and the concept of alternative response, were unlikely to have heard of PAD before the survey and, if they had heard of it, were unlikely to have engaged its services.





**Figure 10.** Respondents' Use of 911 and PAD Services

### Satisfaction with Response Services

Satisfaction with 311 and PAD was essentially equal at 74% and 73%, respectively, while satisfaction with 911 was significantly lower at 62%, especially regarding quality-of-life calls (see Figure 12).<sup>52</sup> Written survey feedback about PAD and 311 described that callers were eager for solutions, such as housing and mental health services. Also, respondents noted that the service was “excellent,” even if the desired outcome was not reached. Critiques of both PAD and 311 were similar in that callers reported that the same person they had called about had returned to frequent their area.

Satisfaction with 911 was highest in Zone 5 (77%), while dissatisfaction was highest in Zone 3 and Zone 6 (38%). Satisfaction rates in Fulton County were identical to those of Atlanta respondents. It is important to note that Atlanta and Fulton County use different 911 call centers. In Atlanta, the Atlanta E911 Communications Center is run by APD, and Fulton jurisdictions use the Fulton County Emergency Communications Center. The satisfaction rates between Atlanta (63%) and Fulton (61%) were not significantly different.

Among the users of 911, all age groups were most likely to call 911 for mental health concerns compared with all

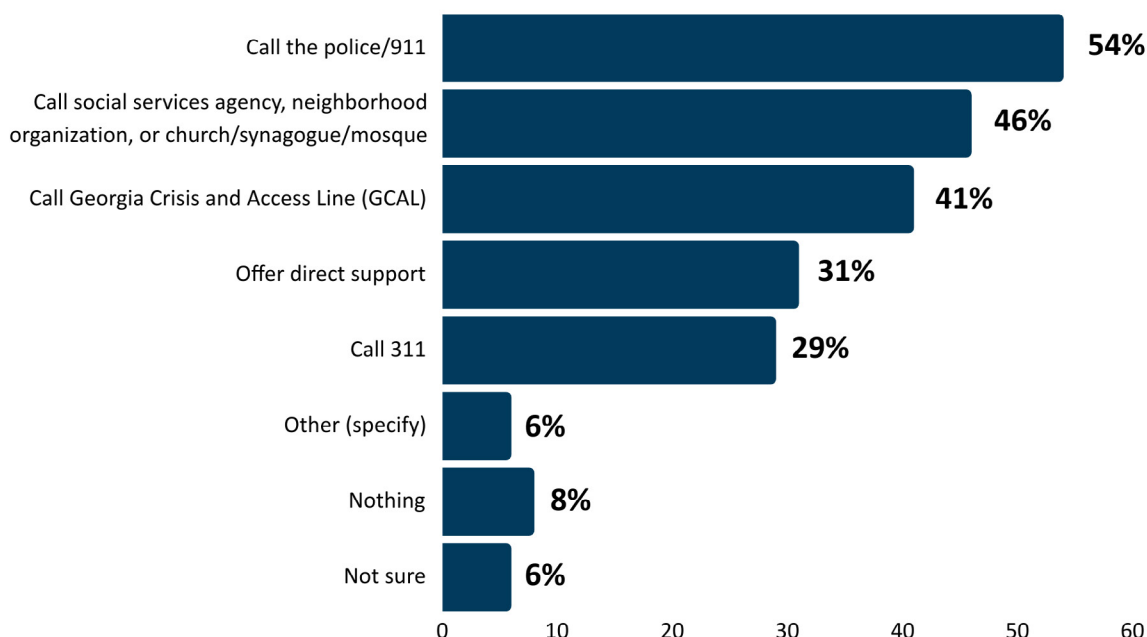
other concerns that were provided as possible responses (Figure 10). Despite respondents' pronounced desire for an alternative response to police for mental health, homelessness, and substance use concerns (see Figure 7), many respondents still relied on 911 to resolve these issues (see Figure 10). This comparison demonstrates that overreliance on 911 for non-emergent matters overburdens emergency dispatch centers and forms a key barrier to alternative response services, like PAD, that are provided via other service lines, such as 311.

Figure 11 affirms this overreliance on 911. During the initial question set of the survey, respondents were asked about actions they were willing to take if they witnessed an individual experiencing homelessness or a mental health crisis. “Calling the police or 911” remained the most dominant response until respondents were introduced to the concept of alternative response services. Following an explanation of PAD's services, respondents' preference for alternative response to mental health and homelessness issues increased by 37% and 46%, respectively (see Figure 13 in the Discussion section of this report).

These results indicate that even basic exposure to the concept of service-oriented, non-police response to quality-of-life issues can improve support for these services.

<sup>52</sup> For 911 callers, n = 321. For 311 callers, n = 135. For users of PAD, n = 82.

**Which of the following actions would you be willing to take if you witnessed concerns associated with substance use, mental health, homelessness, or poverty?**

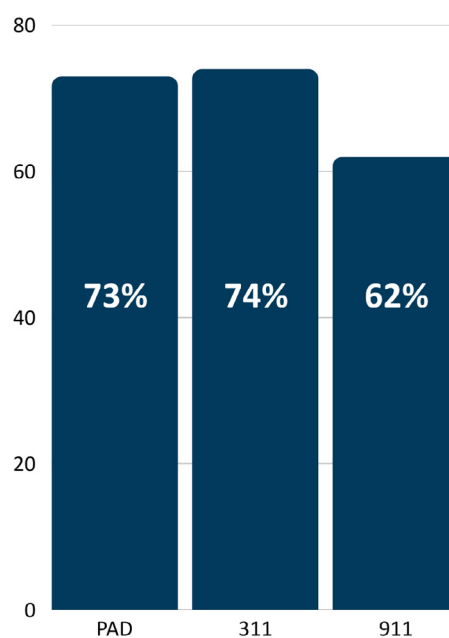


**Figure 11.** Potential Responses to Witnessing a Mental Health, Substance Abuse, or Homelessness Issue

Focus groups convened to discuss community concerns, alternative response, and PAD expressed similar sentiments. Stakeholders from a downtown Atlanta group expressed concern that some of the people who were offered support services in the neighborhood refused them. While participants understood PAD's consent-based model (further expanded on below), and agreed with the approach, they also desired a solution for repeated refusals.

This criticism of PAD may stem from a lesser-known feature of its alternative response model: harm reduction. PAD's harm reduction approach acknowledges small changes over time rather than forcing or coercing abstinence, or a "cold turkey" approach. This approach holds that allowing for this autonomy also encourages personal accountability. When PAD is called out to attend to those experiencing homelessness, substance use issues, or mental health concerns, they prioritize the consent and willingness of the individual to receive resources. Also, the prioritization of consent is inherent in PAD's design, as they do not have the authority to enforce the law. During the focus groups, one participant noted, "If [PAD is] consent-based, it's OK. But if it's not consent-based, it's just going to be like the police."

**How would you rate your satisfaction with calling 911/311/PAD for that situation?**



**Figure 12.** Satisfaction with 911/311/PAD Call Outcomes



# Qualitative Findings

## Focus Groups

TechnoMetrica convened 35 individuals into four community focus groups divided by individuals representing the geographic areas of North Fulton, Northeast Atlanta, Southwest Atlanta, and South Fulton (Table 2). The groups included individuals who reside in Atlanta and Fulton County, whose responses were meant to reflect the experiences and opinions of community members.

Across all focus groups, participants had a positive view of the concept of alternative response and PAD. PAD garnered 100% support from every community focus group except Northeast Atlanta (90%). Many see PAD as a necessary resource to respond to homelessness, substance use, and mental health concerns. Participants expressed a desire for expanded resources to assist PAD in responding to calls. Across all focus groups, the following issues were uniformly agreed upon:

- A lack of transitional, temporary, and affordable housing.
- A lack of support and resources – such as food, clothing, and other basic needs – for those with limited incomes or those experiencing poverty.
- A lack of support for individuals with histories of criminal legal system contacts in accessing basic needs or social services.
- Insufficient affordable services for substance use and mental health issues.
- A lack of effective programming for individuals experiencing substance use and severe mental health concerns.

Despite perceiving a deficient support service infrastructure, each group believed that an approach to quality-of-life issues that prioritized care was necessary. The focus groups offered two key insights:

- Police should focus on what they are primarily trained to do and allow professionals with other types of training – social or community workers, mental health professionals, etc. – to attend to mental health and other concerns related to basic needs.

- Police and other first responders should be trained to take time in getting to know the communities where they work and learn how to respond creatively and appropriately to quality-of-life issues they encounter as part of their job. Individuals within the law enforcement and first responder focus group agreed that they would benefit from more training in community policing and response, as well as diversion.

## Community Focus Groups

Each community focus group emphasized its concerns regarding mental health issues in its community. Individuals in North Fulton had different perceptions of mental health concerns than Atlanta and South Fulton participants. One North Fulton participant noted that in their community, “mental health is hidden. Mental health hides behind the walls. You don’t know who has issues and needs help.” Participants in other jurisdictions noted that mental health issues are more visible in their community. All participants expressed positivity toward the proposition of PAD responding to mental health calls, noting that a police response is more highly associated with the potential for conflict.

When asked about quality-of-life issues in general, a participant in Southwest Atlanta proposed a thoughtful critique of basic needs and quality of life being prescribed “from the perspective of the city – not the individuals with those needs.” To promote a more holistic approach to care, this focus group – composed of social workers, people who have interacted with PAD, and low-income individuals – suggested a framework for quality-of-life support defined by those seeking services.

Participants in Atlanta tended to be more aware of PAD than those in Fulton County. PAD is currently only operable in the City of Atlanta, significantly increasing the likelihood of Atlanta respondents’ having heard of it. Atlanta participants, who indicated that they were more likely to be involved in neighborhood associations, also described a desire to be able to enjoy their neighborhoods without “disruptions” (defined by focus group participants as individuals yelling/talking incoherently, endangering themselves by walking into traffic, or individuals who are unclothed). They expressed a belief that a law

Table 2. Community Focus Group Geographic Areas

<b>North Fulton:</b> High-income, predominantly white, Asian, and Hispanic community. Seven total participants.	<b>Northeast Atlanta:</b> Median-income community representing a broad range of neighborhoods. Ten total participants.	<b>Southwest Atlanta:</b> Low-income community in the early stages of gentrification. Ten total participants.	<b>South Fulton:</b> Low-income community with diverse education and racial makeups. Eight total participants.
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enforcement response to this is a “band-aid approach,” providing a temporary solution rather than addressing community mental health needs.

Despite higher levels of awareness among Atlanta respondents, respondents noted a concern about receiving misinformation from public safety officials regarding the availability of alternative response services in their community. In one instance, a participant in a community focus group reported being told by a police officer that PAD did not operate in DeKalb County, which is false (PAD operates in the part of Atlanta that falls within DeKalb County), and feeling frustrated at the lack of information and continuity from institutions in Atlanta.

The main concern expressed by the community focus groups around PAD was the safety of community responders in situations where calls might turn violent or necessitate a police response. In situations where a PAD responder encounters a potential threat to safety, they are trained to disengage. However, such instances are rare.

Overall, focus group participants expressed eagerness for a novel approach to quality-of-life concerns in their

communities. When asked to describe the concept of alternative response, participants used the following language:

- “Someone who can get to the root of the calls through a conversation.”
- “De-escalating the situation, getting to the root of the problem, and finding a solution other than, ‘OK, it’s time for you to go to jail.’”
- “A humane approach instead of an armed approach.”
- “A de-escalated or decriminalization response to what I would describe more as social issues than criminal issues.”
- “It’s a different way of handling a problem, finding a better way of handling a problem, learning how to deal with the different people that have different issues and what’s the best outcome for that person.”

These descriptions are consistent with a desire to approach quality-of-life issues in a manner that relies more heavily on the fields of social work and mental health care.

# Discussion

The results of the polling and focus groups highlight a number of considerations for alternative response services not just in Atlanta and Fulton County but also across the U.S. Namely, two central themes emerged from this data:

- Individuals have a strong desire for an alternative response to quality-of-life issues in their communities.
- More education and outreach is needed to increase the awareness and use of alternative response services.

Most respondents perceive that the role of the police has been expanded to encompass broad social issues that may be better placed outside of the criminal legal system (69%). Fulton County's Familiar Faces study, referenced earlier in this report, confirms what many respondents report witnessing in their communities: Policing and jails are ineffective means of assisting those with complex and often intersectional issues.

Respondents favored a response option that prioritizes long-term, root-cause care. Significantly, support for alternative response services increased as respondents became more familiar with PAD's model and services. Figure 13 shows that less than half of participants initially were willing to call social services if they witnessed somebody

experiencing mental health or poverty crises. After a series of questions that explained alternative response services, respondents were increasingly supportive of both PAD and alternative response models in general. This finding is most pronounced in questions of baseline support and support for expanding alternative response services.

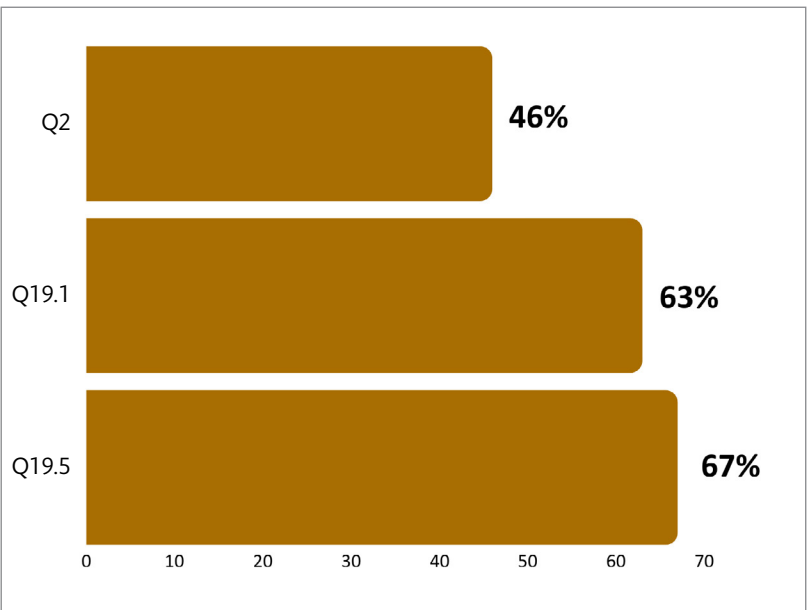
Question 13 on the survey asked: "Alternative first response or community response is a response by unarmed specialists, rather than police, to incidents that do not involve weapons. What is your level of support, if any, for community response teams in Atlanta as an alternative to police response for concerns related to substance use, mental health, homelessness, or poverty?"

In response, 71% expressed support for an alternative response model in Atlanta. Later in the survey, respondents are asked about their support of expanding services like PAD. Question 20 asked: "Do you support or oppose expanding the availability of alternative response services like PAD for non-emergency quality-of-life concerns related to mental health, substance use, homelessness, or poverty?"

In response, 76% indicated support for expanding alternative response services such as PAD. Survey biases are controlled based on the structure of the survey.

Questions explicitly mentioning alternative response services and PAD appeared later in the survey, following questions about 311 and 911, which prevents the primacy effect<sup>53</sup> on respondents. Additionally, grouping relevant questions with one another reduced the impact of question ordering bias. The increasing occurrence of both support and actionable interest throughout the survey suggests that broader outreach efforts around alternative response services likely will improve support and use.

The need for more outreach and education around alternative response services ties in with another core theme of the survey results: misconceptions. Respondents were likely to (1) inflate or confuse the role of alternative response and (2) criticize the services of PAD when unfamiliar with their model.



**Figure 13.** Respondents' Increasing Support for Policing Alternatives  
*See Annexes A and B for survey questions*

<sup>53</sup> The primacy effect occurs when individuals tend to remember the information first presented to them rather than the information presented later.

The qualitative portion of the survey yielded more insight into the nature of these misconceptions. In-depth responses described a wealth of services that participants believed PAD to be performing, some of which were outside of PAD's scope of work. While PAD operates in a niche that touches many intersectional issues within a community, such misperceptions of its services could create confusion. During a focus group with PAD's staff, this finding was reaffirmed by an employee who expressed that PAD maintains the lane of a "triage" service to move vulnerable people toward services and away from jails rather than the position as a direct provider of these services.

The misconception of the scope of PAD's services could feed into another point of confusion: PAD's consent-based approach, inspired by the harm reduction model and embedded in its scope of work as a nonstate agent without law enforcement authority. Harm reduction strategies treat substance use, poverty, and mental health issues as unique, individual cases, a standard that many

are not afforded in the criminal legal system. Under this model, service providers are encouraged to meet individuals at the level of their current capacity, and to prioritize improving the quality-of-life of an individual through access to basic needs. The cessation of drug use and admittance to inpatient treatment is not the singular end goal; rather, the goal is forward movement toward a healthier, safer life.<sup>54</sup> Studies have found that simple support mechanisms—such as family reconnection<sup>55</sup> and access to counseling and therapy—can reduce recidivism more effectively than measures such as incarceration or boot camps.<sup>56</sup>

An additional point for further research relates to potential misinterpretation of the nature of criminal charges brought against those experiencing homelessness or other quality-of-life issues. Separate research has found that the vast majority of criminal trespassing prosecutions were against those experiencing homelessness.<sup>57</sup> It is possible that participants responded more strongly to the *connotations* of criminal trespassing than to the act itself. Future

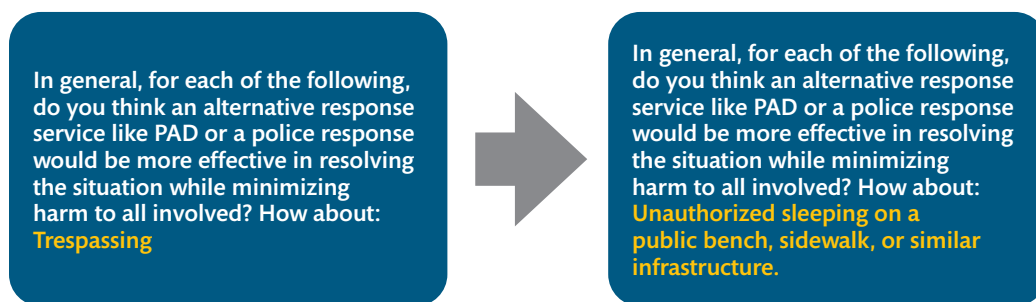


Figure 14. Potential Alteration to Survey Question About Trespassing

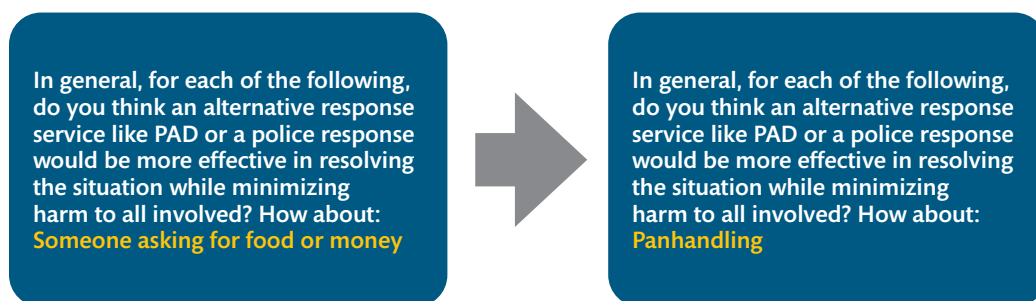


Figure 15. Potential Alteration to Survey Question About Asking for Money

54 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), *Overdose Prevention and Response Toolkit* (PEP23-03-00-001; Rockville, MD: SAMHSA, July 2025), <https://library.samhsa.gov/product/overdose-prevention-response-toolkit/pep23-03-00-001>.

55 Macdonald, Christel, Ehsan Jozaghi, Emily K. Jenkins, Samantha Wells, and Benedikt Fischer. 2024. "Interventions to Reduce Harms Related to Drug Use among People Who Experience Incarceration: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *The Lancet Public Health* 9 (9): e684-e699.

56 Ojmarh Mitchell, David B. Wilson, and Doris L. MacKenzie, "Does Incarceration-Based Drug Treatment Reduce Recidivism? A Meta-Analytic Synthesis of the Research." *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 3, No. 4 (September 28, 2007): 353-75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-007-9040-2>.

57 Brandy Diamond, Rebecca Burns, and Kate Bowen, "Criminalizing Homelessness: Circumstances Surrounding Criminal Trespassing and People Experiencing Homelessness," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 33, No. 6 (2021): 563-83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08874034211067130>.

polls may consider testing how phrasing and framing impact an individual's support for an alternative response in relation to acts such as trespassing or theft. Figure 14 shows a question from the survey (left) and a potential alteration (right) to the question that might inspire contrasting responses despite the subject matter remaining the same.

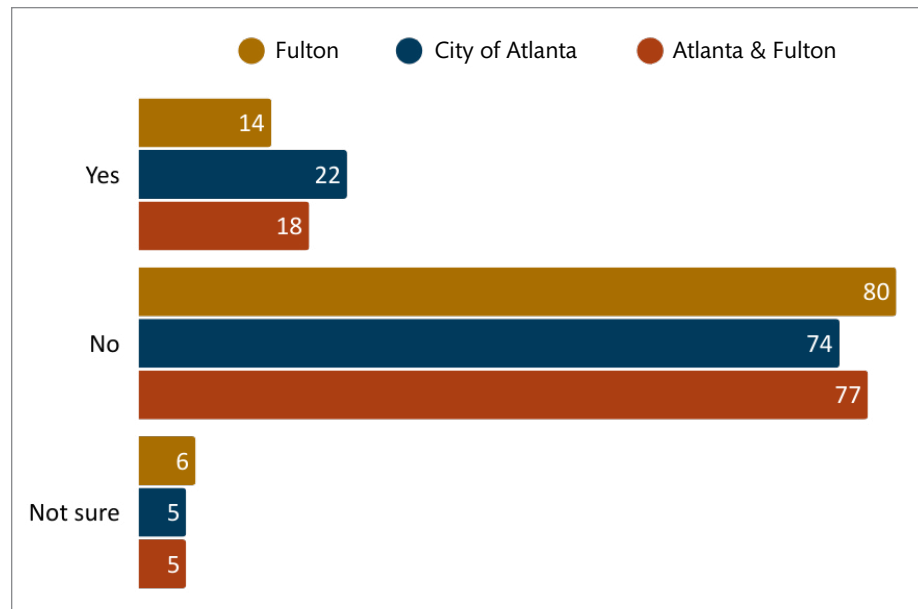
The opposite could also be true. Figure 15 converts a survey question (left) from a description of a situation to the legal moniker of the criminal charge associated with said situation (right).

More research is needed on this topic to explore the potential correlation between framing and support for alternative response models. This is a direction for future research that could yield valuable insights for the field as more alternative response services become available or expand in jurisdictions across the U.S.

## Limitations of the Study

One of the primary limitations of this study was the 50/50 split of participants between Atlanta and Fulton County. The study included participants from both Atlanta and areas of Fulton County outside of Atlanta city limits. While some residents may live in both jurisdictions, our Fulton-based respondents did not reside within Atlanta city limits. The almost equal split between Atlanta and Fulton respondents could have diluted some of the results around awareness and usage of PAD, as PAD is only accessible within the City of Atlanta. As depicted in Figure 16, there is an eight-point difference in the levels of awareness of PAD between the Atlanta and Fulton County respondents. While PAD expects to expand outside of Atlanta to other cities within Fulton County, the strong inclusion of non-Atlanta participants could have hindered a complete picture of how respondents who currently have access to alternative response services use, support, and engage with these services.

Second, the bulk of written feedback in the survey results stems from Zone 5, which is Downtown/Midtown



**Figure 16.** Differences in Respondents' Awareness of PAD Between the City of Atlanta and Fulton County

Atlanta. This may be due to the longevity of PAD's presence in Zone 5 compared with other policing zones and neighborhoods in Atlanta. PAD first started working in Zone 5 in 2017 and did not expand across the entire city until 2021. As such, Zone 5 community members are more familiar with PAD.

However, the diversity in the neighborhoods, socioeconomic statuses, and demographics across each policing zone and Fulton County will not guarantee that the feedback PAD received from Zone 5 can be generalized across all locales. As PAD continues service citywide, a follow-up public opinion report after five years of PAD services is recommended to better capture a holistic picture of attitudes, usage, and engagement with alternative response services in Atlanta.

Another potential limitation is the presence of social desirability bias,<sup>58</sup> which can be especially persistent during focus group discussions on social issues. Attempts to limit social desirability bias included using forced-choice questions and neutral framing.

All in all, there is strong potential for these results to be generalized for other alternative response programs in other jurisdictions. Aspects of these results – such as over-reliance on 911, low awareness of alternative response services, and the identification of mental health and homelessness as key community concerns – are consistent with other findings in relevant literature.<sup>59, 60</sup> Other features

<sup>58</sup> Social desirability bias is the tendency for respondents involved in research to answer questions based on how they wish to be perceived rather than how they truly feel. Mario Callegaro, "Web Survey," in *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*, ed. Paul J. Lavrakas (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947.n537>

<sup>59</sup> Vera Institute of Justice, *Civilian Crisis Response Toolkit*, April 2022, <https://www.vera.org/civilian-crisis-response-toolkit>

<sup>60</sup> Christina Mancini and Christi Metcalfe, "Public Assessments of the Criminal Justice System in Addressing Mental Health," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 89 (November-December 2023): 102120, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2023.102120>

of this research are likely to be more specific to Atlanta and Fulton County—specifically, questions about Atlanta 311, since the routing of services through a dispatch operation is almost endemic to this jurisdiction.

Significantly, these results point to many areas of future research that can contribute to knowledge generation

around policing alternatives, diversion, and improving awareness to support the expansion and utilization of alternative response services. Notably, research around framing, effective outreach strategies, and capacity building would be beneficial areas to increase attention and resources as alternative response services expand.

# Conclusion

Alternatives to police response present innovative options for addressing mental health, substance use, and poverty crises across the U.S. In the City of Atlanta, PAD offers a way to address these challenges with dignity and support for marginalized individuals rather than incarceration. The Carter Center sought to measure community members' attitudes toward quality-of-life issues, alternative response services, and the current state of response for mental health conditions, homelessness, and substance use concerns.

A total of 1,327 individuals in Atlanta and Fulton County were surveyed. Overwhelmingly, over 70% of respondents support alternative response services, and more than three-fourths supported expanding services such as PAD. The biggest barrier for PAD is a lack of awareness of alternative response services generally and for PAD in particular. Respondents indicate an eagerness to use services such as PAD, and those who have used PAD's services report being satisfied with the outcomes of their calls to PAD. Largely, respondents believe that PAD should be publicly funded.

Results from the survey also indicate that respondents have a nuanced understanding of the role of police in addressing quality-of-life concerns. Respondents were able to simultaneously acknowledge the role that law enforcement plays in maintaining public safety and that alternative response services are better positioned to

handle nonviolent matters relating to mental health conditions, substance use concerns, and homelessness. This view stems from respondents' understanding that approaches relying on unarmed specialists are more likely to result in the provision of services and addressing the root cause of an issue, and less likely to escalate the risk of harm.

The data illustrate broader support for the use of public funds for rehabilitative measures rather than punitive ones. Overwhelmingly (64%), respondents prefer the allocation of public funds and taxpayer dollars to support alternative response teams such as PAD. Written survey feedback indicated that support for private funds (58%) was due to the fear that PAD could be impacted by political obstacles or a shift in government priorities.

Qualitative findings from this report offer a more detailed perspective of the quantitative findings. Participants highlight the importance of community buy-in as PAD continues to expand. Further, participants acknowledge the need for a stronger social service infrastructure and more training for individuals responding to people with mental health, substance use, or poverty concerns.

Overall, these polling results demonstrate that individuals in Atlanta and Fulton County favor pivoting toward alternative response models as a solution for mental health, substance use, and poverty-related concerns.



# Recommendations

As alternative response services continue to grow across the country, this study identified several gaps that hinder their expansion and availability, particularly in Atlanta and Fulton County. The following recommendations encapsulate the results from this survey and insights from scholarship that bolster these findings.

## Institutionalize and Expand Alternative Response Services

Solidifying alternative response services as formal first responders in the City of Atlanta – responsible for nonviolent, quality-of-life concerns relating to poverty, substance use, and mental health-related issues – requires the employment of strategic policy measures and the inclusion of alternative response services as an item in the city budget. The institutionalization of alternative response services like PAD within the City of Atlanta will secure their sustainability, support their expansion, and improve the social service infrastructure.

Among the measures that would support the institutionalization of alternative response services:

- Identifying a city government department responsible for contracting and growing alternative response.
- Including alternative response services in the general fund of the city budget.
- Expanding the availability of alternative response services to 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Scaling the use of alternative response services by dispatching appropriate 911 calls to service providers like PAD.

As Atlanta's sole alternative response service, PAD has quickly become a staple in the first responder network, connecting and providing thousands of vulnerable Atlantans with food, housing, legal support, and long-term care, demonstrating the viability and value of alternative response services. To support this institutionalization, alternative response services should be included as a dedicated line item in the city budget.

PAD currently only operates through Atlanta 311 from 7 a.m. to midnight on weekdays in Atlanta. Expanding the service to 24 hours a day, seven days a week will require resources, both from the local government and PAD, but this is a critical step in further institutionalizing alternative response services as a first resort in the city, offering

needed support to more community members who would otherwise face incarceration.

In parallel, the expansion of alternative response services across Fulton County is highly recommended. Access to a nonviolent response to quality-of-life concerns should be encouraged as a measure of improving the quality of social services and support infrastructure across all jurisdictions. A joint funding model between Atlanta and Fulton County could be leveraged to increase investment from local government, helping to institutionalize community access to alternative response services.

## Increase Awareness and Use of Atlanta 311 and PAD

Among the measures that would increase awareness and use of alternative response services:

- Engaging stakeholders in targeted outreach efforts.
- Conducting a cost-benefit analysis to gauge long-term impact of alternative response services.
- Expanding public polling across the state of Georgia to identify areas for expansion.

Currently, most respondents are unaware of both Atlanta 311 and PAD. This lack of awareness is a barrier to the broad use and expansion of these resources. Coordinated outreach efforts from stakeholders such as the Grady Health System, the Atlanta Police Department, Atlanta Fire and Rescue, and the City of Atlanta would streamline and improve the flow of information about this invaluable public service.

Targeted outreach efforts must be tailored to Atlanta community members. As noted in the qualitative results, respondents who are curious about these resources have received conflicting information from law enforcement officers. Proper investment in Atlanta 311 and PAD at the local level must prioritize education and training on these services for public safety, first responders, and government officials about PAD's scope, referral process, and harm reduction principles, to ensure quality information is provided to and available for all Atlantans.

Additional research is necessary to support and improve the operation and availability of services such as PAD. Specifically, a cost-benefit analysis is imperative for future research directions. Early research into the positive cost-savings impact of alternative response services is promising; however, it remains unclear whether

these studies can be generalized. Because most of these programs are nascent—many in operation less than five years—it is difficult to secure long-term, comprehensive data concerning the fiscal impact of alternative response services. Therefore, a cost-benefit analysis that captures the enduring impact of alternative response services is recommended to contribute to the knowledge generation on this subject.

Additional public opinion polling in various Georgia cities and counties also is recommended. Outside of large

urban centers, the struggle for social services to engage in outreach and awareness activities becomes even more amplified. Inviting a service such as PAD to act in a triage capacity between a community and the available resources could have significant impacts. Public polling will enable proponents of PAD and similarly situated organizations to better understand which Georgia locales have the most residential buy-in and desire for these resources.

# Annex A: Survey Questionnaire (English)

## Section 1: Key Concerns in the Community

**Q1: Which of the following, if any, are key concerns in your community? How about: (READ. SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.)**

1. Mental health concerns
2. Public intoxication or drug use
3. Someone asking for food or money
4. Public urination, defecation, or indecency
5. Homelessness
6. Disturbances, such as someone being disruptive in a business or public place
7. Someone selling drugs or sex
8. Theft
9. Trespassing
10. Are there any other key concerns in your community? (Specify.)
11. None of the above (DO NOT READ.)
12. Not sure (DO NOT READ.)

**Q2: Which of the following actions would you be willing to take if you witnessed any of those types of concerns associated with substance use, mental health, or poverty in your community? (DO NOT READ. CHECK ALL THAT APPLY. CONFIRM CHOICE.)**

1. Call the police/911.
2. Call 311.
3. Call Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL).
4. Offer direct support.
5. Call social services agency, neighborhood organization, or church/synagogue/mosque.
6. Nothing
7. Other (specify)
8. Not sure

**Q3: Generally speaking, what role do you think the police should have in responding to concerns related to substance use, mental health, or poverty? Would you say the police should: (READ.)**

1. Be the primary responder.

2. Be a co-responder along with another primary responder.
3. Only play a role if requested by another primary responder.
4. Have no role.
5. Not sure (DO NOT READ.)

## Section 2: Awareness and Use of 311

IF Q2 IS NOT OPTION 2

**Q4: Are you aware that you can call 311 about concerns related to substance use, mental health, or poverty?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

ALL AWARE OF 311 (IF Q2=2 OR Q4=YES; ALL OTHERS GO TO Q9):

**Q5: How did you become aware of the option to call 311 for those types of issues? (DO NOT READ.)**

1. News story
2. Advertising
3. Social media
4. Word of mouth
5. Learned about when calling 311 for other issues
6. Community outreach (e.g. neighborhood organization, NPU meeting, table at an event)
7. Church, synagogue, mosque, or other faith community
8. College or university social media or event
9. Other (specify)
10. Not sure

**Q6: Have you ever called 311 about any substance use, mental health, or poverty-related concerns?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

IF Q6=YES (ALL OTHERS GO TO Q9.):

**Q7: What led you to call 311 instead of 911 in that situation(s)? (OPEN END)**

**Q8: How would you rate your satisfaction with calling 311 for that situation(s)? Likert 1-5 Satisfied/Dissatisfied/NS**

1. Very dissatisfied
2. Somewhat dissatisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Somewhat satisfied
5. Very satisfied
6. Not sure

**Q8a: Why is that? (OPEN)**

### **Section 3: Use of 911**

ALL

**Q9: Have you ever called 911 in response to any substance use, mental health, or poverty-related concerns?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

IF Q9=YES:

**Q10: What was the situation that led you to call 911? (DO NOT READ. SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.)**

1. Mental health concerns
2. Public intoxication or drug use
3. Someone asking for food or money
4. Public urination, defecation, or indecency
5. Homelessness
6. Disturbances, such as someone being disruptive in a business or public place
7. Someone selling drugs or sex
8. Theft
9. Trespassing
10. Other (specify)
11. Not sure

**Q11: How would you rate your satisfaction with calling 911 for that situation? (Likert 1-5 Satisfied/Dissatisfied/NS)**

1. Very dissatisfied
2. Somewhat dissatisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Somewhat satisfied
5. Very satisfied
6. Not sure

### **Section 4: Familiarity with Policing Alternatives in General**

**Q12: How familiar are you with Alternative First Response or Community Response as an alternative to policing for certain types of incidents? (Likert 1-5 Very/Not At All Familiar/NS)**

1. Not at all familiar
2. Not very familiar
3. Somewhat familiar
4. Very familiar
5. Not sure

**Q13: (ALL) Alternative First Response or Community Response is response by unarmed specialists, rather than police, to incidents that do not involve weapons. What is your level of support, if any, for Community Response teams in Atlanta as an alternative to police response for concerns related to substance use, mental health, or poverty? (Likert 1-5 Support Strongly/Not At All/NS)**

1. Strongly oppose
2. Somewhat oppose
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat favor
5. Strongly favor
6. Not sure

**Q13a: And why is that?**

### **Section 5: Familiarity with and Use of PAD**

**Q14: The Policing Alternatives and Diversion Initiative, or PAD, is an Atlanta nonprofit organization that responds to community calls for assistance related to mental health, substance use, or extreme poverty instead of the police. If police are already involved,**

**they can divert someone to PAD instead of making an arrest. When PAD receives a 311 community referral, they can provide ongoing case management to qualified individuals to address the root causes of many law violations. Before this survey today, had you ever heard of PAD?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

IF Q14=YES (ALL OTHERS SKIP TO NEXT SECTION Q19.)

**Q14a: And before this survey today, how familiar were you with PAD and its services? Would you say (Likert 1-5 Very/Not At All Familiar/NS)**

1. Not at all familiar
2. Not very familiar
3. Somewhat familiar
4. Very familiar
5. Not sure

**Q15: How did you first become aware of PAD? (DO NOT READ.)**

1. News story
2. Advertising
3. Social media
4. Word of mouth
5. Learned about when calling 311 for other issues
6. Community outreach (e.g, neighborhood organization, NPU meeting, table at an event)
7. Church, synagogue, mosque, or other faith community
8. College or university social media or event
9. Other (specify)
10. Not sure

**Q16: Have you ever had any direct interaction with PAD? Y/N/NS**

IF Q16=YES

**Q17: What was the situation that led you to call PAD? (DO NOT READ. SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.)**

1. Mental health concerns
2. Public intoxication or drug use
3. Someone asking for food or money
4. Public urination, defecation, or indecency

5. Homelessness
6. Disturbances, such as someone being disruptive in a business or public place
7. Someone selling drugs or sex
8. Theft
9. Trespassing
10. Other (specify)
11. Not sure

**Q18: Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with PAD in resolving a situation that may otherwise have resulted in police involvement? (Likert 1-5 Very to Not At All Satisfied/Not Sure)**

1. Very dissatisfied
2. Somewhat dissatisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Somewhat satisfied
5. Very satisfied
6. Not sure

**Q18a: And why is that?**

ALL

**Q19: For each of the following, what type of response would be more effective in resolving the situation while minimizing harm to all involved? How about: (READ) (Grid-PAD More Effective/Police More Effective/Both Equally Effective/Not Sure)**

19.1: Mental health concerns

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

19.2: Public intoxication or drug use

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

19.3: Someone asking for food or money

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

19.4: Public urination, defecation, or indecency

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

19.5: Homelessness

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

19.6: Disturbances, such as someone being disruptive in a business or public place

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

19.7: Someone selling drugs or sex

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

19.8: Theft

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

19.9: Trespassing

1. PAD more effective
2. Police more effective
3. Both equally effective
4. Not sure

**Q19a: Is there any other situation where you think a service like PAD would be as effective or more effective than a police response? (OPEN)**

**Q20: Do you support or oppose expanding the availability of alternative response services like PAD for non-emergency quality-of-life concerns related to mental health, substance use, or poverty in Metro**

**Atlanta? (Likert 1-5 Strongly Support to Strongly Oppose/NS)**

1. Strongly oppose
2. Somewhat oppose
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat favor
5. Strongly favor
6. Not sure

IF Q20=3, 4, or 5 (ALL OTHERS GO TO Q22.)

**Q21: How do you think alternative response teams like PAD should be funded or paid for? Would you say (Select all that apply):**

1. Tax dollars or public funding
2. Private donations or grants
3. Crowdfunding
4. Other (Specify)
5. Not sure (DO NOT READ)

ALL

## **Section 7: Demographics**

**What is your Zip code? And what zone is that?**

1. Zone 1: Northwest Atlanta
2. Zone 2: Buckhead/Northeast Atlanta
3. Zone 3: Southeast Atlanta
4. Zone 4: Southwest Atlanta
5. Zone 5: Downtown Atlanta
6. Zone 6: East Atlanta
7. Not sure

**What is your age?**

1. 18-24
2. 25-34
3. 35-44
4. 45-54
5. 55-64
6. 65+

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

**Do you identify as:**

1. Male

2. Female
3. Trans male
4. Trans female
5. Nonbinary

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

**In terms of your ethnicity, are you of Hispanic origin or descent?**

1. Yes
2. No

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

**And what is your race?**

1. White
2. Black
3. Asian
4. Native American
5. Multi-racial
6. Other (specify)

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

**Are you the parent of any children under the age of 18 living in your household?**

1. Yes
2. No

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

**What is the highest level of education that you've completed?**

1. Some high school
2. High school graduate
3. Some college
4. College graduate
5. Some graduate courses
6. Graduate/professional degree

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

**Do you or a family member work in:  
Law enforcement?**

1. Yes
2. No

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

Social services?

1. Yes
2. No

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

**Have you or a family member ever experienced arrest or incarceration?**

1. Yes
2. No

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

**Which of the following categories includes your approximate household income before taxes for 2023?**

1. Under \$20,000
2. Between \$20,000 and \$30,000
3. Between \$30,000 and \$40,000
4. Between \$40,000 and \$50,000
5. Between \$50,000 and \$75,000
6. Between \$75,000 and \$100,000
7. Between \$100,000 and \$200,000
8. Between \$200,000 and \$250,000
9. Over \$250,000

(Don't read: Prefer not to answer.)

## Section 8: Focus Group Invite

Okay and finally, we will also be conducting virtual focus groups this summer with Atlanta residents to learn more about their awareness and experience with policing alternatives. Focus groups are group interviews that last about an hour and a half. They will be conducted online by Zoom this summer, and if you're interested, we will follow up once they are scheduled to see if you're available.

**Would you like to be part of a focus group? Y/N**

1. Yes
2. No

IF YES: Collect contact information.

## Section 9: (Phone only) Incentive Drawing

As a thank you for participating in this survey, you are eligible to be entered into a random drawing for one of three \$50 Visa gift cards, or one grand prize of a \$100 Visa gift card. Would you like to be part of this drawing?

IF YES: Collect/confirm contact information.



## Annex B: Survey Questionnaire (Spanish)

**Q1: ¿Cuáles de los siguientes puntos, si los hubiera, son preocupaciones clave en su comunidad? (LEER. MARQUE TODAS LAS QUE PROCEDAN.)**

1. Problemas de salud mental
2. Intoxicación en público o consumo de drogas
3. Alguien pidiendo comida o dinero
4. Orinar, defecar o indecencia en público
5. Personas sin hogar
6. Disturbios, como alguien que ocasiona molestias en un negocio o lugar público
7. Alguien que vende drogas o sexo
8. Robo
9. Entrar Sin Derecho
10. ¿Hay otras preocupaciones clave en su comunidad? (ESPECIFICAR)
11. Ninguno (EXCLUSIVE)
12. No estoy seguro (EXCLUSIVE)

**Q2: ¿Cuál de las siguientes acciones estaría dispuesto a tomar si fuera testigo de problemas relacionados al uso de sustancias, la salud mental, la falta de vivienda o la pobreza? (NO LEER. MARQUE TODAS LAS QUE PROCEDAN.)**

1. Llamar a la Policía/911
2. Llamar al 311
3. Llamar a la Línea de Crisis y Acceso de Georgia (GCAL)
4. Ofrecer soporte directo
5. Llamar a una agencia de servicios sociales, organización vecinal o iglesia/sinagoga/mezquita
6. Nada
7. Otro
8. No estoy seguro

**Q3: En términos generales, ¿Qué papel creería usted que debería tener la policía a la hora de responder a inquietudes relacionadas con el consumo de sustancias, la salud mental, la falta de vivienda o la pobreza?**

1. Ser el primero en intervenir

2. Ser co-responsable junto con otro interventor primario
3. Desempeñar un papel sólo si lo solicita otro interventor primario
4. No tener ningún papel
5. No estoy seguro (EXCLUSIVE)

SI Q2 NO ES NO. 2

**Q4: ¿Sabe que puede llamar al 311 si tiene inquietudes relacionadas con el uso de sustancias, la salud mental, la falta de vivienda o la pobreza en la ciudad de Atlanta?**

1. Sí
2. No
3. No estoy seguro

SI Q2=2 o Q4=SÍ; TODOS LOS DEMAS VAN AL Q9

**Q5: ¿Cómo se enteró de la opción de llamar al 311 para ese tipo de problemas? (NO LEER. MARQUE TODO LO QUE CORRESPONDA)**

1. Noticias
2. Publicidad
3. Medios de comunicación social
4. Boca a boca
5. Aprendí cuándo llamar al 311 para otros asuntos
6. Relaciones con la comunidad (por ejemplo, organización vecinal, reunión de la NPU, participación en un evento)
7. Iglesia, sinagoga, mezquita u otra comunidad religiosa
8. Universidades o colleges, redes sociales, o eventos
9. Otro (ESPECIFICAR)
10. No estoy seguro (EXCLUSIVE)

**Q6: ¿Alguna vez ha llamado al 311 por algún problema relacionado con el uso de sustancias, la salud mental, la falta de vivienda o la pobreza en la ciudad de Atlanta?**

1. Sí
2. No

3. No estoy seguro
4. SI Q6=SÍ; TODOS LOS DEMAS VAN AL Q9

**Q7: ¿Qué lo llevó a llamar al 311 en lugar del 911 en esa(s) situación(es)?**

**Q8: ¿Cómo calificaría su satisfacción al llamar al 311 en esa(s) situación(es)?**

1. Muy insatisfecho
2. De alguna manera insatisfecho
3. Ni satisfecho ni insatisfecho
4. De alguna manera satisfecho
5. Muy Satisfecho
6. No estoy seguro

**Q8a: ¿Y por qué es eso?**

**Q9: ¿Alguna vez ha llamado al 911 en respuesta a alguna inquietud relacionada con el uso de sustancias, la salud mental, la falta de vivienda o la pobreza?**

1. Sí
2. No
3. No estoy seguro

SI Q9= SÍ:

**Q10: ¿Cuál fue la situación que lo llevó a llamar al 911? (NO LEER. MARQUE TODO LO QUE CORRESPONDA)**

1. Problemas de salud mental
2. Intoxicación en público o consumo de drogas
3. Alguien pidiendo comida o dinero
4. Orinar, defecar o indecencia en público
5. Personas sin hogar
6. Disturbios, como alguien que ocasiona molestias en un negocio o lugar público
7. Alguien que vende drogas o sexo
8. Robo
9. Entrar Sin Derecho
10. Otro (ESPECIFICAR)
11. No estoy seguro [EXCLUSIVE]

**Q11: ¿Cómo calificaría su satisfacción al llamar al 911 en esa situación?**

1. Muy insatisfecho
2. De alguna manera insatisfecho
3. Ni satisfecho ni insatisfecho

4. De alguna manera satisfecho
5. Muy Satisfecho
6. No estoy seguro

**Q12: ¿Hasta qué punto conoce la primera respuesta alternativa o la respuesta comunitaria como opción a la actuación policial en determinados tipos de incidentes?**

1. Nada familiar
2. No muy familiar
3. Algo familiar
4. Muy familiar
5. No estoy seguro

**Q13: La primera respuesta alternativa o respuesta comunitaria es la respuesta de especialistas desarmados, en lugar de la policía, a incidentes que no involucran armas.**

**¿Cuál es su nivel de apoyo, si lo hubiera, a los equipos de respuesta comunitaria en Atlanta como alternativa a la respuesta policial para asuntos relacionados con el uso de sustancias, la salud mental, la falta de vivienda o la pobreza?**

1. Totalmente en contra
2. Algo en contra
3. Neutral
4. Algo a favor
5. Muy a favor
6. No estoy seguro

**Q13a: ¿Y por qué es eso?**

**Q14: Policing Alternatives & Diversion Initiative, o PAD, es una organización sin fines de lucro de Atlanta que responde a las llamadas comunitarias de asistencia en la ciudad de Atlanta relacionadas con la salud mental, el consumo de sustancias, la falta de vivienda o la pobreza extrema en lugar de una respuesta policial. Si la policía ya estuviere interviniendo, puede derivar a alguien en PAD en lugar de proceder a una detención. Cuando PAD recibe una derivación 311 de la comunidad, puede ofrecer la gestión continua del caso a personas calificadas con el fin de abordar las causas profundas de muchas infracciones de la ley.**

**Antes de esta encuesta, ¿había oído hablar alguna vez de PAD?**

1. Sí
2. No

3. No estoy seguro

SI Q14= SÍ (TODOS LOS DEMÁS PASAN A LA Q19)

**Q14a: Y antes de esta encuesta de hoy, ¿qué tan familiarizado estaba con PAD y sus servicios? Dirías:**

1. No muy familiar
2. Algo familiar
3. Muy familiar
4. No estoy seguro

**Q15: ¿Cómo se enteró por primera vez de PAD? (NO LEER)**

1. Noticias
2. Publicidad
3. Medios de comunicación social
4. De boca en boca
5. Aprendí sobre PAD al llamar al 311 por otros problemas
6. Relaciones con la comunidad (por ejemplo, organización vecinal, reunión de la NPU, participación en un evento)
7. Iglesia, sinagoga, mezquita u otra comunidad religiosa
8. Universidades o colleges, redes sociales, o eventos
9. Otro (Especificar)
10. No estoy seguro [Exclusive]

**Q16: ¿Alguna vez ha tenido alguna interacción con PAD? (SELECCIONE TODAS LAS QUE CORRESPONDAN)?**

1. Sí, llamé a PAD a través del 311
2. Sí, llamé a PAD directamente
3. Sí, interactué con PAD de alguna otra manera (Especificar)
4. No, nunca tuve ninguna interacción con PAD (Exclusive)
5. No estoy seguro (Exclusive)

SI Q16=SÍ

**Q17: ¿Cuál fue la situación que le llevó a llamar al PAD? (NO LEER. MARQUE TODO LO QUE CORRESPONDA.)**

1. Preocupaciones de salud mental
2. Intoxicación pública o consumo de drogas
3. Alguien pidiendo comida o dinero
4. Orinar, defecar o indecencia en público

5. Personas sin hogar

6. Disturbios, como alguien que ocasiona molestias en un negocio o lugar público
7. Alguien que vende drogas o sexo
8. Robo
9. Entrar Sin Derecho
10. Otra (Especificar)
11. No estoy seguro (Exclusive)

**Q18: En general, ¿cómo calificaría su satisfacción con PAD a la hora de resolver una situación que de otro modo habría resultado en la participación de la policía?**

1. Muy insatisfecho
2. De alguna manera insatisfecho
3. Ni satisfecho ni insatisfecho
4. De alguna manera satisfecho
5. Muy Satisfecho
6. No estoy seguro

**Q18a: ¿Y por qué es eso?**

1. TODOS
2. Agradecemos sus atentas respuestas a esta encuesta hasta el momento. Esta pregunta se agregó únicamente con fines de control de calidad de los datos. Por favor seleccione "B" a continuación:
3. A
4. B
5. C
6. D
7. No estoy seguro

**Q19: En general, para cada uno de los siguientes casos, ¿Cuál le parece sería una respuesta más efectiva para resolver la situación y al mismo tiempo minimizar el daño a todos los implicados: Un servicio de respuesta alternativo como PAD o una respuesta policial?**

1. Problemas de salud mental
2. Intoxicación en público o consumo de drogas
3. Alguien pidiendo comida o dinero
4. Orinar, defecar o indecencia en público
5. Personas sin hogar
6. Disturbios, como alguien que ocasiona molestias en un negocio o lugar público

7. Alguien que vende drogas o sexo
8. Robo
9. Entrar Sin Derecho

[Column List]:

1. Servicio de respuesta alternativo
2. Respuesta policial
3. Ambos igualmente efectivos
4. No estoy seguro

**Q19a: ¿Existe alguna otra situación en la que usted crea que un servicio como PAD sería tanto o más efectiva en comparación con una respuesta policial?**

**Q20: ¿Apoya o se opone a ampliar la disponibilidad de servicios de respuesta alternativos como PAD para problemas de calidad de vida que no sean de emergencia relacionados con la salud mental, el uso de sustancias, la falta de vivienda o la pobreza?**

1. Totalmente en contra
2. Algo en contra
3. Neutral
4. Algo a favor
5. Muy a favor
6. No estoy seguro

SI Q20=3, 4, o 5 (TODOS LOS DEMÁS PASAN A LA Q22)

**Q21: ¿Cómo cree que se deberían financiar o pagar los equipos de respuesta alternativos como PAD? Usted diría (marque todo lo que corresponda):**

1. Impuestos o fondos públicos
2. Donaciones o subvenciones privadas
3. Recaudación de fondos
4. Otro (Especificar) [Respondent Specify]
5. No estoy seguro [Exclusive]

**Q22: PAD coordina con el Departamento de Policía de Atlanta bajo ciertas condiciones para brindar apoyo en lugar de arresto o detención en la ciudad de Atlanta. ¿El trabajo de PAD con la policía le hace:**

1. Es más probable que llame a PAD
2. Es menos probable que llame a PAD
3. Da igual, o
4. No sabes lo suficiente sobre el trabajo de PAD con la policía para decir

**Q23: ¿Cuál de estas declaraciones representa mejor su posición sobre la actuación policial?**

1. El sistema policial actual es efectivo
2. El sistema policial actual no es efectivo
3. La policía está sobrecargada
4. Si no invertimos en soluciones novedosas, las cosas empeorarán
5. Ninguno de esos [Exclusive]
6. No estoy seguro [Exclusive]

**Q24: ¿Cuál de estas afirmaciones representa mejor su postura sobre la vigilancia policial y el encarcelamiento como respuesta a las infracciones de la ley relacionadas con la calidad de vida?**

1. No deberíamos arrestar a una persona en crisis
2. Si incumple las normas, debe ir a la cárcel
3. Quedarse sin hogar no debería ser ilegal
4. Las personas se merecen dignidad y apoyo, incluso en su peor día
5. Ninguno de esos [Exclusive]
6. No estoy seguro [Exclusive]

**Q25: ¿Cómo recibe información sobre seguridad pública en su área? (Marque todo lo que corresponda).**

1. Apps comunitarias como NextDoor o Ring
2. Facebook, Instagram u otras redes sociales
3. Noticias locales
4. Sistema de alerta de la ciudad, como alertas de texto NOTIFYATL
5. Redes sociales o sistema de alerta de colegios/universidades
6. Reuniones vecinales o de NPU
7. De boca en boca
8. Carteles/anuncios en transporte público y andenes de MARTA
9. Vallas publicitarias u otros anuncios públicos
10. Sondeo puerta a puerta
11. Otro (Especificar) [Respondent Specify]
12. No estoy seguro [Exclusive]

**Q26: ¿Cuál es su código postal?**

**Q27: ¿Y qué zona es esa?**

1. Zona 1: Noroeste de Atlanta
2. Zona 2: Buckhead/Noreste de Atlanta

3. Zona 3: Sureste de Atlanta
4. Zona 4: Suroeste de Atlanta
5. Zona 5: Centro de Atlanta
6. Zona 6: Este de Atlanta
7. Metro Atlanta/otro (Especifique)  
[Respondent Specify]
8. No estoy seguro

**Q28: ¿Cuál es su edad?**

1. Under 18
2. 18-24
3. 25-34
4. 35-44
5. 45-54
6. 55-64
7. 65+
8. Prefiero no responder

**Q29: ¿Cómo se identifica?**

1. Hombre
2. Mujer
3. Hombre transexual
4. Mujer transexual
5. No binario
6. Prefiero no responder

**Q30: En términos de su origen étnico, ¿es usted de origen o ascendencia hispana?**

1. Sí
2. No
3. Prefiero no responder

**Q31: ¿Cuál es su raza?**

1. Blanco
2. Negro
3. Asiático
4. Nativo Americano
5. Multirracial
6. Otro (Especificar) [Respondent Specify]
7. Prefiero no responder

**Q32: ¿Es usted padre de algún niño menor de 18 años que viva en su hogar?**

1. Sí

2. No
3. Prefiero no responder

**Q33: ¿Cuál es el nivel más alto de educación que ha completado?**

1. Parte de la secundaria
2. Graduado de secundaria
3. Educación Superior parcial/ no graduado
4. Graduado de la Universidad
5. Algunos cursos de posgrado
6. Título Universitario/ Licenciatura/Profesional
7. Prefiero no responder

**Q34: ¿Usted o algún familiar trabaja en:**

1. ¿Cumplimiento de la ley?
2. ¿Servicios sociales?

[Column List]:

1. Sí
2. No
3. Prefiero no responder

**Q35: ¿Usted o algún miembro de su familia ha experimentado alguna vez un arresto o encarcelamiento?**

1. Sí
2. No
3. Prefiero no responder

**Q36: ¿Cuál de las siguientes categorías incluye su ingreso familiar aproximado antes de impuestos para 2023?**

1. Menos de \$20,000
2. Entre \$20,000 y \$30,000
3. Entre \$30,000 y \$40,000
4. Entre \$40,000 y \$50,000
5. Entre \$50,000 y \$75,000
6. Entre \$75,000 y \$100,000
7. Entre \$100,000 y \$200,000
8. Entre \$200,000 y \$250,000
9. Más de \$250,000
10. Prefiero no responder

¡Gracias por participar en nuestra encuesta! Presione el botón Siguiente para enviar sus respuestas.

# Annex C: Focus Group Questions

## INTRODUCTIONS (10 minutes)

- a. Who we are and goals/ground rules (1-2 minutes)
- b. Participant introductions (8-10 minutes) First name, where do you live, one sentence why you came to this focus group
1. How many of you were aware of PAD before participating in the survey or being invited to this focus group? (show of hands) (2 minutes)
2. In your own words, can you describe what an alternative response team is? (5-10 minutes)

## MODERATOR: READ DESCRIPTION OF PAD/ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE (2 minutes)

3. Do you support a service like PAD for quality-of-life issues related to substance use, mental health, homelessness, or poverty? Raise hands if you're supportive/not supportive/not sure. We will ask "why's" later, so just indicate your level of support now (Show of hands 2 minutes).
  - a. **[Probe]** What does quality-of-life mean to you in this context? (3-10 minutes)
4. What kinds of mental health concerns would trigger you to call for help versus do nothing? Please give examples. (10-15 minutes)
5. What information do you think would be most successful in helping educate people about the benefits of alternative response programs like PAD to increase public support? (15 minutes)
  - a. Do you think it's important to know that PAD is consent-based and participants must agree to receive support?
6. Which of the following would persuade you to call 311 instead of 911 for a quality-of-life concern related to substance use, mental health, homelessness, or poverty? (Raise hands for preference) (10 minutes)

- a. The Atlanta Police Department is overburdened by responding to non-emergency calls.
- b. APD's response times are significantly longer than PAD's.
- c. Local law enforcement is arresting and jailing individuals experiencing homelessness, poverty, and substance abuse instead of diverting individuals to receive support and resources.
- d. Individuals connected to PAD are given resources, referrals, and transportation assistance to address immediate and longer-term needs.

## [Optional, time permitting]

7. What would you be willing to do to support PAD's work? (general discussion of options) (10 minutes)
  - a. Tell your friends about PAD.
  - b. Donate to PAD.
  - c. Call 311 to engage PAD's community response team when appropriate.
  - d. Inform others about PAD's Community Response services and encourage them to call 311 when appropriate.
  - e. Call your city councilperson on behalf of PAD.
  - f. Volunteer with PAD.
  - g. Something else?
  - h. None of these

## WRAP UP/ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (10 minutes)

- a. Anything important to add that we did not already cover?
- b. Provide slide with 1) PAD website and contact info for more information and 2) include link to new diversion center website.

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