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Summer 2026



When Prevention Is Everyone's Job

The Role of Directors of Community Services in Threat Assessment and Management Teams



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Across New York State, counties are building something that did not widely exist just a few years ago: multidisciplinary teams dedicated to identifying and intervening with individuals who may be on a path toward targeted violence before that path reaches its end. Threat Assessment and Management (TAM) teams bring together law enforcement, mental health professionals, school officials, and other community partners to assess and manage threats before they escalate. They are becoming a cornerstone of public safety strategy, and Directors of Community Services (DCSs) are not just participants in that work. We are essential to it.

DCSs serve as the local government leaders for mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities services in their counties. They oversee the public mental health system, manage relationships with providers, and are often the first call when a complex situation involves someone in crisis or already connected to services. That combination of clinical oversight, system knowledge, and community relationships makes DCSs a natural and necessary partner in TAM work. When a person of concern has a mental health history or needs to be connected to support, the DCS and their team know the landscape in ways that no other TAM partner can replicate.

A Statewide Effort Taking Shape

Across New York, TAM teams are at different stages of development, and that breadth tells its own story. In Dutchess County, the Dutchess County Threat Assessment Group (DCTAG) now includes 65 participating agencies and recently helped a community organization navigate a situation involving online threats. Westchester County's team, co-founded by the Department of Community Mental Health, has handled dozens of cases through a fully operational, multidisciplinary process. In Tioga County, a team that began training in May 2024 recently helped prevent students from carrying out an active plan to bomb a local school.

In Seneca County, the DCS serves as co-lead alongside the Sheriff and Emergency Management Director. In Columbia County, a public-facing website allows anyone to submit a concern directly to the team. In Steuben County, the DCS sits on the executive board, and the team has successfully moved individuals from making terroristic threats to fully engaging in treatment.

These are not outliers. They reflect what's possible when the right partners are at the table and the work is taken seriously.

Why Mental Health Belongs at the Center

There is sometimes a tendency to think of TAM as primarily a law enforcement function. Law enforcement is a critical anchor of these teams, but the model works best when that foundation is broadened to include the full range of community expertise. The multidisciplinary nature of these teams is precisely what makes them effective.

It is also worth being clear about what TAM is and what it is not. TAM is not part of the criminal justice process. It is a proactive, preventative effort to identify individuals who may need support and connect them to services before a situation escalates. In that way, it is similar in spirit to Crisis Intervention Team programming — the goal is to keep people out of the criminal justice system, not funnel them into it.

Threat Assessment and Management Teams (TAM) assess and manage threats before they escalate.



Mental health professionals bring something to TAM that no other partner can replicate: fluency in the behavioral health system. We understand the complexities of mental hygiene law. We have established relationships with providers, crisis services, and individuals already engaged in the system. In Genesee County, that expertise has shaped case outcomes in ways that a law enforcement lens alone could not, from navigating mental hygiene laws to speaking the clinical language to knowing which door to knock on. The team is now also in an active community education phase, helping residents and organizations recognize and report concerning behavior, a reminder that the work of a functioning TAM team extends well beyond the meeting room.

In Oneida County, mental health was not invited as an afterthought. From the beginning, mental health professionals were positioned as co-decision-makers, not consultants. That framing mattered, and it was made easier by the strong working relationships between law enforcement and behavioral health that already existed through CIT programming. The result is a team where mental health isn't simply present; it is central to how the team assesses situations and connects people to the right support.

What Sustained Success Requires

Counties that are thriving share some common threads: consistent meeting schedules, executive-level buy-in, clear protocols, and meaningful training. Counties that are struggling often cite similar challenges: building the legal and procedural frameworks that allow partners to share information appropriately, sustaining engagement across busy agencies, and ensuring the right expertise is in the room when a specific case requires it. None of these are unique to any one county, and none are insurmountable.

Training is where the gap shows up most clearly. Teams that have invested in it, like Genesee, which brought in retired FBI behavioral science consultants, or Onondaga, which has trained over 300 school staff, describe it as foundational. Teams still waiting for that investment describe feeling underprepared when real cases arrive. TAM is an evolving discipline, and the professionals doing this work need ongoing access to quality training to stay current and respond effectively.

Building What Lasts

TAM teams do not come together overnight, and they don't sustain themselves without investment. The lesson from counties across New York is consistent: start with willing partners, build trust through consistency, and don't wait for perfect conditions. A small, well-communicating team is far better than no team at all, and additional partners tend to join once they see a functional, supportive system already in place.

What turns a promising model into a lasting one is the commitment behind it, in people, in training, and in the recognition that preventing violence is not a law enforcement problem or a mental health problem. It is everyone's responsibility.



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