

# ALBANY LEAD

## Annual REPORT

2023



**ALBANY**  
Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion

[www.AlbanyLEAD.org](http://www.AlbanyLEAD.org)

# From the Project Managers

Albany Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion is now in its 9th year of operation. During 2023, LEAD case managers worked with 198 clients to address needs such as finding and keeping secure housing, obtaining care after hospital visits, arranging access to medical services, treatment for substance use or mental health issues, and providing support for court appointments.

A total of 52 individuals were referred to Albany LEAD during the year. These included six through pre-arrest diversion by Albany Police and 46 through referrals by APD officers, the District Attorney's Office, Public Defender's and Alternate Public Defender's Offices, and Department of Probation. In helping clients improve their lives by addressing both immediate needs and longer-term goals, LEAD seeks to reduce future arrests and incarceration. Clients often speak of the positive difference that LEAD makes in their lives. Independent evaluation that began in 2023 will help stakeholders better understand where LEAD is working well and where new approaches may be more effective.

Planning and preparations during 2023 laid the groundwork for an exciting new LEAD initiative that is now underway, a street-based treatment program within the Albany County Department of Mental Health. The goal is to better help individuals who are not well served in clinic- or office-based treatment settings. Another important step for the initiative occurred in September 2023, when LEAD project management and community engagement became part of Trinity Alliance of the Capital Region.

We look forward to working with the LEAD Policy Coordinating Group, other stakeholders and the broader community to continue moving LEAD forward in the coming year.



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Photos by El-Wise Noisette and Lucia Sullivan



# Who is Involved in Albany LEAD?

Our Policy Coordinating Group guides the work of project managers and governs our initiative. Voting members of the group include the following leaders and their designees:

**Albany Mayor**  
**Kathy M. Sheehan**

**Albany County Executive**  
**Daniel P. McCoy**

**Albany County District Attorney**  
**P. David Soares**

**Center for Law and Justice**  
**Executive Director Dr. Alice P. Green**

**Albany Police Chief**  
**Eric Hawkins**

**Central District Management Association**  
**Executive Director Anthony Capece**

The Operational Work Group meets biweekly to discuss challenges LEAD clients are facing, as well as progress toward their goals. The group works to brainstorm, collaborate, and share strategies to support clients. This group consists of the following organizations:

- Albany County Department of Mental Health
- Albany County Department of Probation
- Albany County Department of Social Services
- Albany County District Attorney's Office
- Albany County Alternate Public Defender's Office
- Albany County Public Defender's Office
- Albany Police Department
- Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services
- The Center for Law and Justice
- Joseph's House Outreach Van
- St. Catherine's Center for Children
- Trinity Alliance of the Capital Region



# What is Albany LEAD?

Albany LEAD helps people who may experience mental illness, substance use, poverty, or homelessness receive support rather than experiencing cycles of arrest, prosecution and incarceration related to those issues. LEAD case managers meet people where they are physically and metaphorically, addressing immediate and long-term needs. Case managers develop a care plan based on the person's goals and self-identified needs.

## PATHWAYS INTO LEAD



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Last year [in 2023] I came in contact with an individual. Due to some health and safety concerns, he would set up a tent on private property as a place to stay. He chose locations where he thought he would not get in the way or be visible to the property owner.

When I received complaints for him, I would advise him that he could not remain on property and he would leave. Subsequently, he would change locations and cause another complaint. **I felt that arrest for trespass would do nothing but set him back further.**

I contacted Diana from LEAD regarding this person's situation. Diana immediately began working with him to make a plan. Through Diana's hard work with this person she was able to get him off of the street and is **in the process of getting him permanent housing**. Without the help and determination of Diana, LEAD and Catholic Charities, I'm certain he would have continued down the same path of homelessness and eventually arrest.



Officer Sal Sturiale,  
Albany Police Department



# Client Services

**198  
People  
Engaged**

During 2023, case management staff worked with 198 people. As the chart below shows, in 2023, services to help clients find and maintain shelter and housing were by far the most common client contact type, followed by helping clients navigate legal proceedings, and time spent outreach clients in the community.

*"When I first started working with you, I was very skeptical and shut off from the world. But with time and being yourself **you showed me that there are people that really do care.** They are few and far between but they are there. You have had such a huge impact on my life that without you I'd still be running the hamster wheel.*

*Thank you so much for everything. I'm honored to know you and your team."*

-A LEAD client, to a case management supervisor

## Most Common Service Types, 2023



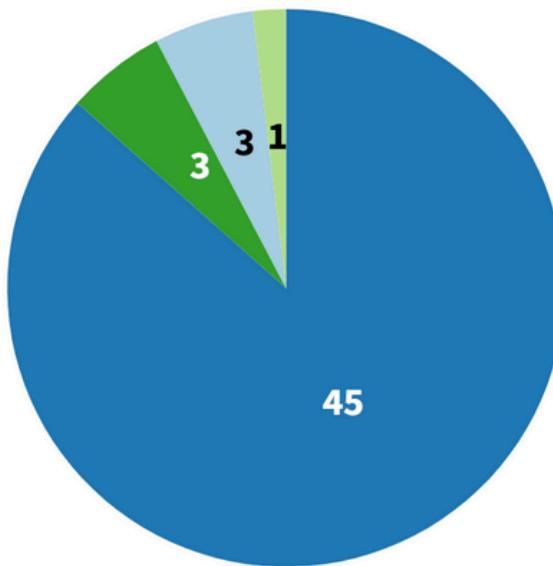
# 2023 Diversions and Referrals



In 2023, a total of **52 people were newly offered LEAD services**: six people were diverted, and 46 people were referred. Diversions only come from Albany Police Department, and referrals can come from Albany Police Department, the District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender/Alternate Public Defender's Offices, and Albany County Probation.

## Diversions and Referrals by Source, 2023

● Albany Police Department  
 ● District Attorney's Office  
● Alternate Public Defender/ Public Defenders' Offices  
 ● Albany County Probation



“ —  
 “You helped me get my life back. I'm sober, I'm happy, I'm free, I have a place to live, a loving family and I have a relationship with my Dad again. He called me yesterday...I was like whoa. But you are a part of that and it **keeps getting better.**”  
 -A LEAD client

”



# Data, Evaluation, and Training

Throughout the past year, Albany LEAD has continued work on outside evaluation, data collection and analysis:

- Dr. Tomoko Udo of the University at Albany School of Public Health leads a team of researchers whose three-year, independent evaluation began in 2023. Work to date includes developing a robust process and outcome evaluation plan, and analysis of data on client services, with preliminary findings expected in 2024.
- Our multi-disciplinary Data and Evaluation Committee continued to analyze ways to improve data collection, analysis and reporting.
- Adam Vose-O'Neal, a Ph.D. scholar at Brandeis University, presented to the Policy Coordinating Group on his preliminary findings from interviews with LEAD clients and Albany Police officers.
- Project management worked closely with the LEAD Support Bureau out of Seattle, and other LEAD initiatives around the country to share best practices and participate in collaborative problem solving.



## In 2023, the following groups participated in LEAD training:

- Albany Police Department Training Academy
- Alternate Public Defender/ Public Defenders' Offices
- District Attorney's Office
- Cohoes Police Department
- Watervliet Police Department
- Classes at UAlbany and Siena College

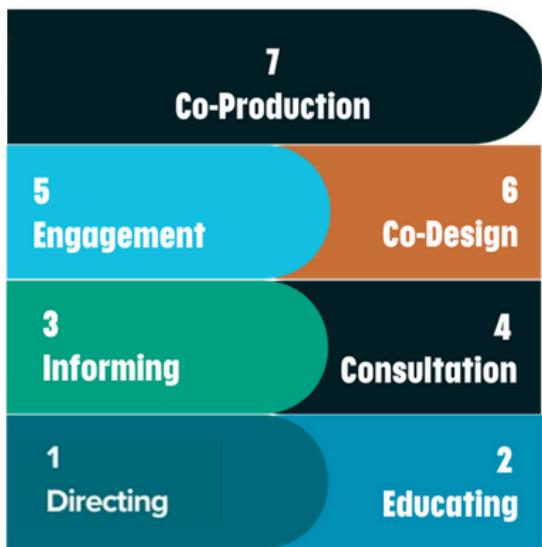
# Community Engagement Goals

The Albany LEAD Policy Coordinating Group held a day-long shared vision/strategic planning meeting in October 2023 to explore strategies for increasing diversions from arrest, goals of community engagement, and the “why” behind our work. This new community engagement plan will be implemented in 2024.

Participants spoke of issues and experiences that brought them to be part of LEAD at its inception in 2015 and to remain actively engaged in 2023. These included:

- Personal or family experience with mental health, substance use, or trauma
- Witnessing the impact of diversion on people’s lives
- Personal values, related to fairness and justice
- Desire to address disparities in arrests and incarceration
- Belief in the need to avoid criminalizing mental health, substance use, homelessness, and trauma.

## The Ladder of Co-Production



The Ladder of Co-Production helps us think about the role of LEAD clients and the community in shaping the initiative. We will strive to implement a **co-design** model of community engagement for Albany LEAD. This means people who use services and are impacted by our focus areas are involved in designing services, based on their experience and ideas. People with lived experience have genuine influence, though our Policy Coordinating Group is responsible for the final decision-making process after considering this input.

Model originates from [thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk](http://thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk)

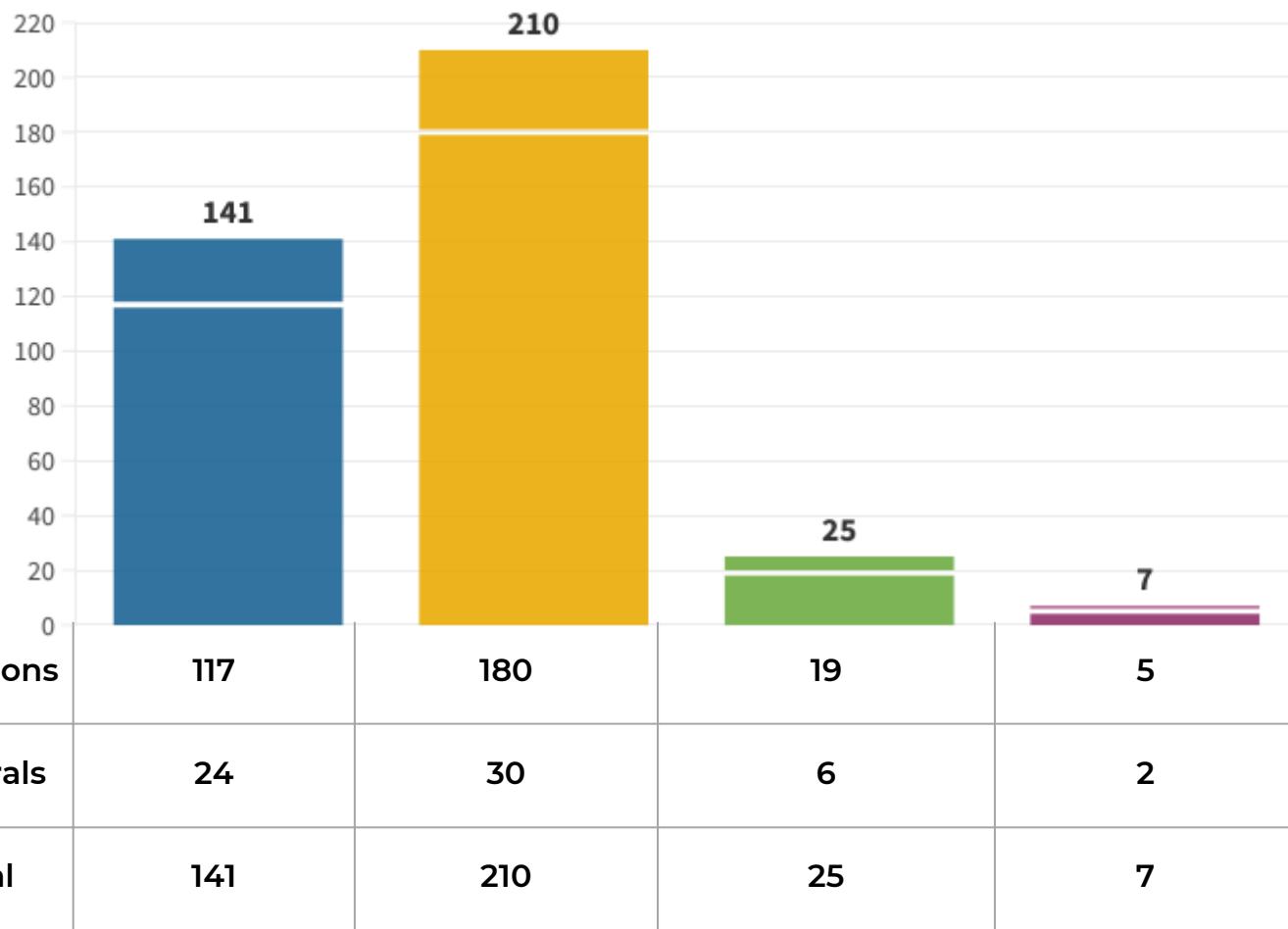
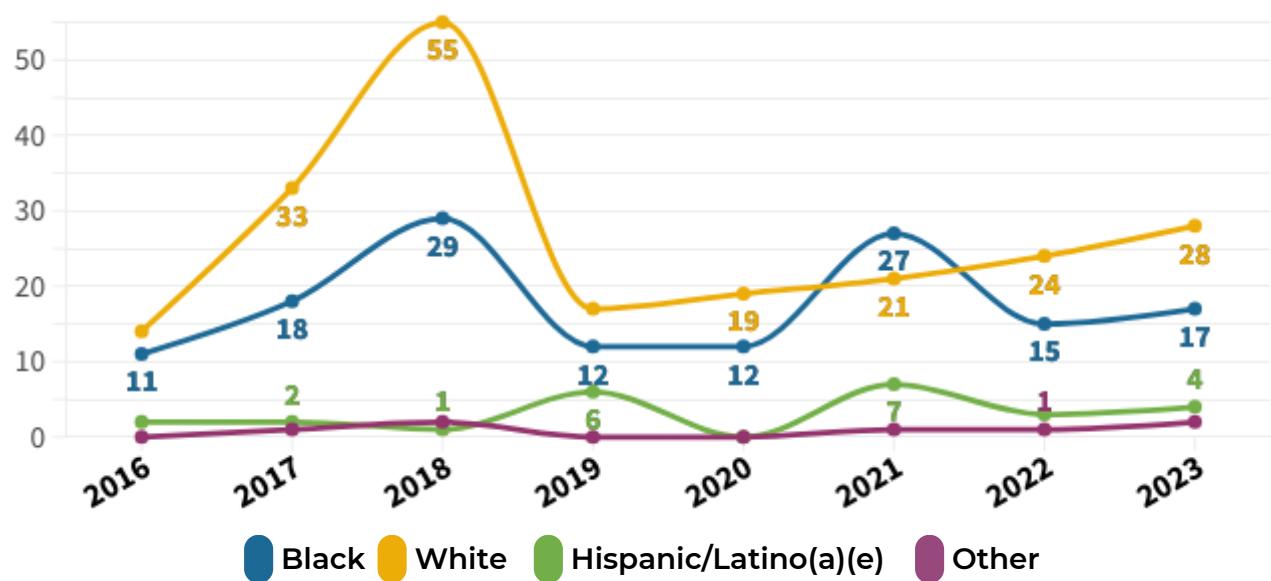
## Goals of Community Engagement:

- Share information with the community in an effort to increase diversions and referrals,
- Inform citizens of their options,
- Uplift community members’ voices and experience,
- Understand community members’ goals for our work
- Expand/create a comprehensive resource guide and outreach plan, and
- Co-create/implement a community group to provide feedback about the initiative’s operations.



# Diversions/Referrals Over Time

We track, and regularly discuss, the racial breakdown of people who are diverted and referred to LEAD. Our goal is to engage a similar proportion of those who are arrested in receiving LEAD services. We continue to strive toward this goal.



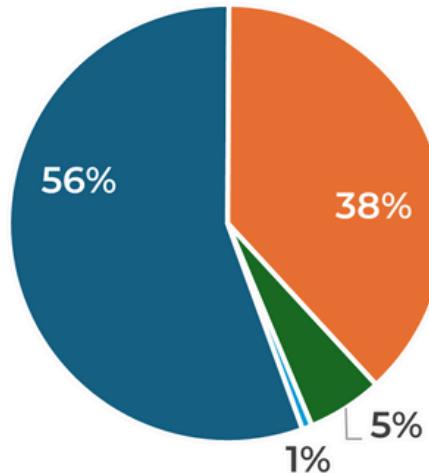
# Expenses and Resources

Staff costs for case managers who work directly with LEAD clients to address their service needs made up more than half of the total \$533,952 in LEAD spending during 2023, followed by expenditures for project management.

## Albany LEAD Expenditures, 2023

(Excludes in-kind spending)

Case Management   Project Management   Evaluation   Albany Police



Albany LEAD has relied on a changing mix of federal grants, private grants, and financial and in-kind support from the City of Albany and Albany County since its implementation in 2016. Two major grants from the U.S. Department of Justice, awarded to Albany County on behalf of LEAD, supported more than 60 percent of 2023 expenditures. Other resources included:

- A New York State legislative grant to Albany County on behalf of Albany LEAD, secured by Assembly Members Patricia Fahy and John McDonald;
- Albany County budgetary funding;
- City of Albany Community Development Block Grant funding;
- Community Development Block Grant/CARES Act funding to Albany County through New York State;
- A New York State Department of Health-Office of Drug User Health grant to Catholic Charities Care Coordination Services; and
- A private foundation grant awarded through the LEAD Support Bureau.

Most current funding for Albany LEAD is time-limited in nature. Project managers and stakeholders continue to seek sustainable funding to assure operation of LEAD for the long term.

# Current Challenges and Future Directions

## Challenges

In 2023 and into 2024, our initiative continued to struggle with **recruitment and retention** of case management staff. In 2024 we will assess our current staffing patterns, explore new recruitment approaches and seek new avenues such as engaging peer specialists and other types of professionals.

Case managers reported ongoing challenges to find **appropriate housing** for clients over the year. LEAD clients and case managers also see first-hand the impact of staffing and services limitations across the human services and health care sectors, which can result in difficulty obtaining needed help for clients.

We continue to seek new ways to **increase diversions and referrals for people of color**, who are disproportionately involved in the criminal legal system.



## Future Directions

Albany LEAD also seeks to better understand **community needs and perspectives** related to our work, and to demonstrate responsiveness to those varied viewpoints and concerns. In 2024, we have hired a full time Community Engagement Coordinator to implement an intentional plan to both educate and hear from the community to inform our work.

In 2024 we are adding a **street-based clinician** to our case management team, in cooperation with the Department of Mental Health, who will meet clients wherever they are to provide assessments and treatment that are necessary for housing access, to meet court mandates, and to help clients meet their own goals for their health and wellbeing.

We also look forward to receiving the first **results of independent evaluation** activities, and using the information gained to further improve LEAD policies and practices. Albany LEAD will also continue to work cooperatively with LEAD in Cohoes and Watervliet, where the initiative began work in mid-2023.



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