



United Way  
of Central Oklahoma



# VITAL SIGNS

Central Oklahoma

MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH  
VOLUME V, EDITION VIII



# **LET'S TALK ABOUT IT: MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>What Is It?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Who Does Mental Illness and Substance Abuse Impact?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>How Does Mental Illness Impact Our Community?</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>What Are We Doing To Help?</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Final Thoughts</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>58</b>



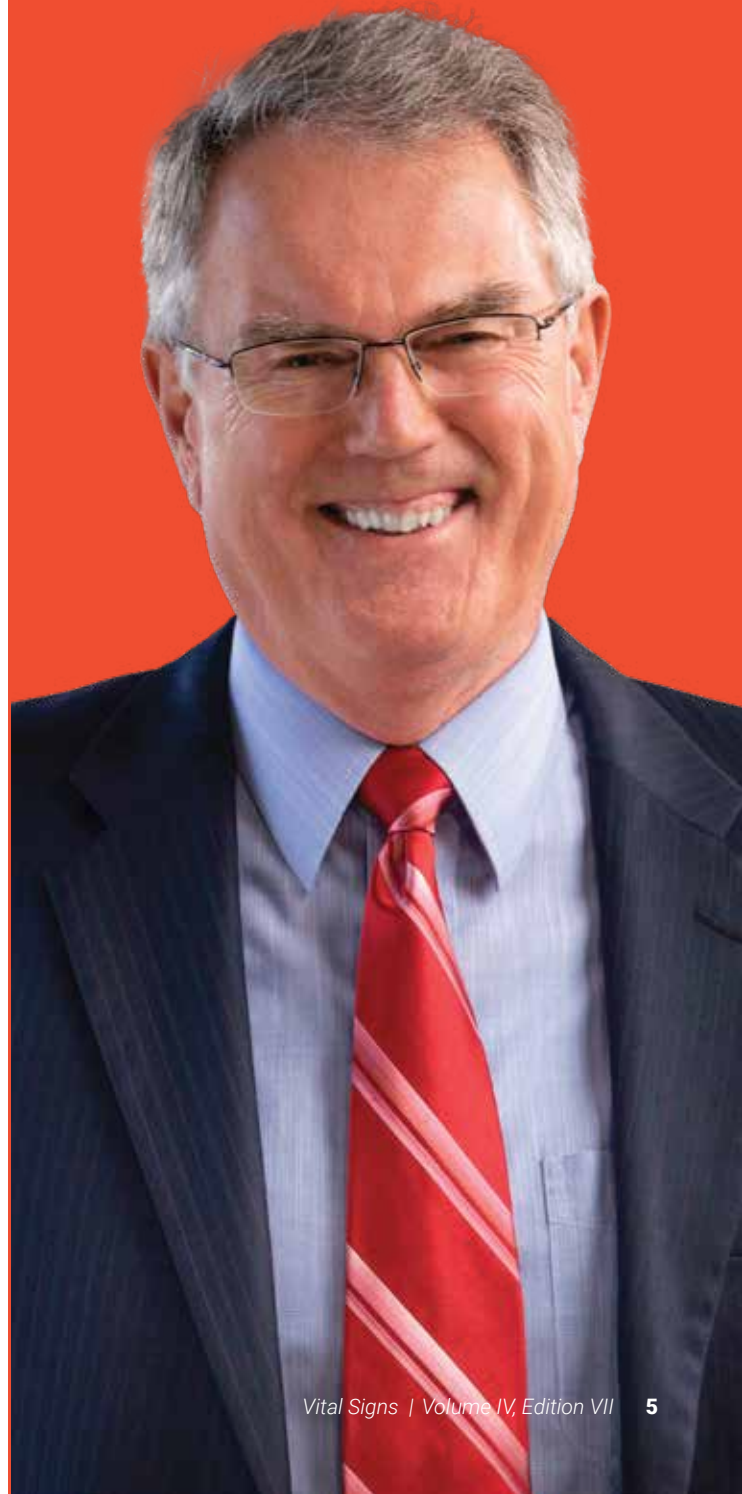
## LETTER FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Dear Community Stakeholder,

As our community continues to deal with the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is widespread recognition of the harmful mental health impacts of the crisis. Early evidence shows that COVID-19 has layered additional risk factors on top of the already rising mental health and addiction issues in our state. According to the Census Household Pulse Survey, the percentage of adults in Oklahoma self-reporting symptoms of depression or anxiety disorders tripled in 2021, reaching 38% in early 2021. Direct evidence links poor mental health status to earlier mortality: life expectancy is 10 years lower on average for those with a mental health condition. Progress in preventing suicides and drug overdoses has been stalled during the pandemic with concerning trends in 2020, particularly for young adults. These concerns create a compounding issue to mental health service providers. Low pay, years of required training at an additional expense, and increased burden due to continued shortages have contributed to the exodus of current providers, as well as a decrease of professionals entering into the field. In this issue of Vital Signs, we will examine the impacts of mental health and substance abuse on children, families and organizations in Central Oklahoma. This issue will provide an update on the prevalence and devastating impact of mental health conditions in our community. With more than 1 in 7 Oklahoma adults receiving mental health services in 2019, the role of partner agencies in meeting the demand for affordable treatment will be reviewed. The pandemic's exacerbation of serious chronic mental health concerns will also be discussed. Additionally, this issue will address the corresponding shortages in the behavioral health workforce and how this contributes to the state of mental health in Oklahoma. Finally, the report will recommend policy changes to improve mental health and substance abuse treatment, as well as how to provide support services and incentive to providers.

**Dave Carpenter**

*Chair, Research and Community Initiatives Committee  
United Way of Central Oklahoma*



A woman with long dark hair is sitting on a couch, looking down at a smartphone in her hand. Her other hand is pressed against her forehead, suggesting distress or worry. She is wearing a brown hoodie and blue jeans. In the foreground, there is a plate with a slice of pizza and a glass of water. The scene is lit with soft, natural light from a window in the background.

**If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, call or text 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.**

# INTRODUCTION

*Mental Health. Substance Use. Behavioral Health.  
Trauma. Anxiety. Toxicity. Depression. Grief.  
Bipolar Disorder. PTSD.*

## **What does it all mean?**

These buzzwords are all part of the challenges many in our community are facing.

# WHAT IS IT?

"Mental Health" and "Behavioral Health" are often used interchangeably; both have the same common core. They are diseases of the brain.

Most are preventable and, like many of the illnesses that plague us as a community, should be detected and treated early in the disease process. While they have the same core, each one requires targeted treatment for the manner in which the disease manifests in the individual. Similar to cancer, where different types require different therapies such as surgery, radiation or chemotherapy; brain diseases should receive individualized treatment for each type of disease present. If a person has mental health and substance abuse issues, each one should be addressed independently. Mental health is understood to be emotional, psychological and social well-being.<sup>1</sup> It impacts

how we think, feel, communicate and behave. Mental illness is a health condition that causes change in emotions, thinking and ways of behaving. There is a misconception that mental illness is readily identifiable, but in reality, mental illness is frequently a silent suffering until the disease process is in the advanced stages. This makes early detection key. The National Alliance on Mental Illness records that the average time from onset of symptoms to treatment is 11 years.<sup>2</sup> Mental illness knows no boundaries. It is estimated that 1 out of 5 Americans have a mental health issue.<sup>2</sup> It impacts all races/ethnicities, gender identities, ages and socioeconomic classes.

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Millions of people are affected by mental illness each year. Across the country, many people just like you work, perform, create, compete, laugh, love and inspire every day.



Source: National Alliance of Mental Illness





***It is estimated that more than one in five adults in the United States live with a mental illness.<sup>3</sup>***

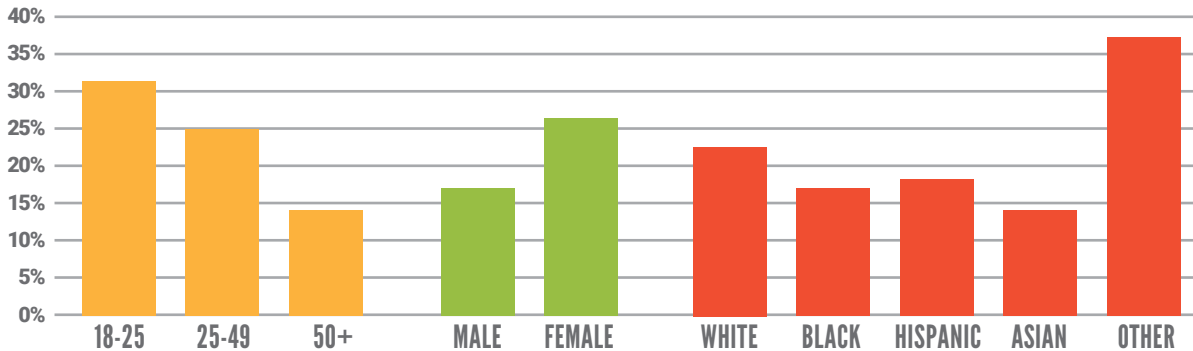
In 2021, there were an estimated 57.8 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States with mental illness. This number represented 22.8% of all U.S. adults.

The prevalence of mental illness was higher among females (27.2%) than males (18.1%).

Young adults aged 18-25 years had the highest prevalence of mental illness (33.7%) compared to adults aged 26-49 years (28.1%) and aged 50 and older (15.0%).

The prevalence of mental illness was highest among the adults reporting two or more races (34.9%), followed by American Indian / Alaskan Native (AI/AN) adults (26.6%). The prevalence of mental illness was lowest among Asian adults (16.4%).

***Percent of the adult population with any mental illness in 2020***



While there are certain mental health disorders that are unpreventable, a large number of them are preventable. Common factors that can lead to the onset of mental illness include:

- Adverse Childhood Experiences where children witness or experience trauma, abuse or violence
- Major health issues such as heart disease, diabetes or cancer
- Biological or chemical changes in the brain
- Substance abuse
- Environmental conditions such as poverty, inequality and violence
- Family history of mental health problems
- Accident or injury resulting in changes in the brain

Behavioral health disorders include substance abuse, eating disorders, sexual or gambling addictions

and self-harm such as cutting. These are not single incidents, but a pattern of behavior that is not easily broken without professional intervention. Untreated, they have destructive impacts on a person's life. While behavioral health issues often overlap with mental health issues, they must both be treated according to the conditions present. If a person suffers from depression and alcohol abuse, the conditions must be treated independently using evidence-based practices for each health condition.

In a recent *Forbes* survey published in May of 2023, Oklahoma was tied with Nevada for the 6th highest rate of mental illness.<sup>4</sup> Almost 27% of Oklahomans were noted to have a mental illness and more than 6% had a serious mental illness (SMI). Serious mental illnesses are those that incur an inability to function and limit major life activities. The most common SMIs are psychotic disorders, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder and schizophrenia.

## SUICIDE

Suicide is a public health problem in the United States and in Oklahoma. The State Department of Health shows death from suicide is almost 3 times the rate of deaths from homicide.<sup>5</sup> Suicide is the 8th leading cause of death in Oklahoma and the 2nd leading cause for both age groups 10-24 and 25-34, and is the 4th leading cause for Oklahomans ages 35-44. Nationally, men die by suicide 3.9 times more often than women, with middle-age white men having the highest rate overall.<sup>6</sup>

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) says “Talk Saves Lives” is a 45- to 60-minute community education program that informs participants in how to understand risk factors and warning signs and how they can help in their communities.<sup>7</sup> So, let’s talk about it. But how? What are the right words to say and what questions should we ask?

### WORDS MATTER. HERE ARE SOME USEFUL TIPS IN TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE.

#### WHAT IS SUICIDE?

**SUICIDE** is when people harm themselves with the goal of ending their life, and they die as a result.

A **SUICIDE ATTEMPT** is when people harm themselves with the goal of ending their life, but they do not die.

Avoid using the terms such as **COMMITTING SUICIDE**, **SUCCESSFUL SUICIDE**, or **FAILED SUICIDE** when referring to suicide and suicide attempts, as these terms often carry negative meanings.

Source: AFSP

*AFSP offers the following suggestions for talking with someone who may be considering suicide.<sup>8</sup>*

#### HAVE AN HONEST CONVERSATION

1. Talk to them in private
2. Listen to their story
3. Tell them you care about them
4. Ask directly if they are thinking about suicide
5. Encourage them to seek treatment or contact their doctor or therapist
6. Avoid debating the value of life, minimizing their problems or giving advice

**Assume you are the only one who will reach out – Have the conversation!**

If you feel they are considering suicide, seek immediate help!

If they are in immediate danger, call 911.

If they are not in immediate danger, stay with them and call 988, the Crisis Hotline.

**Above all, stay with them until appropriate intervention has occurred.**



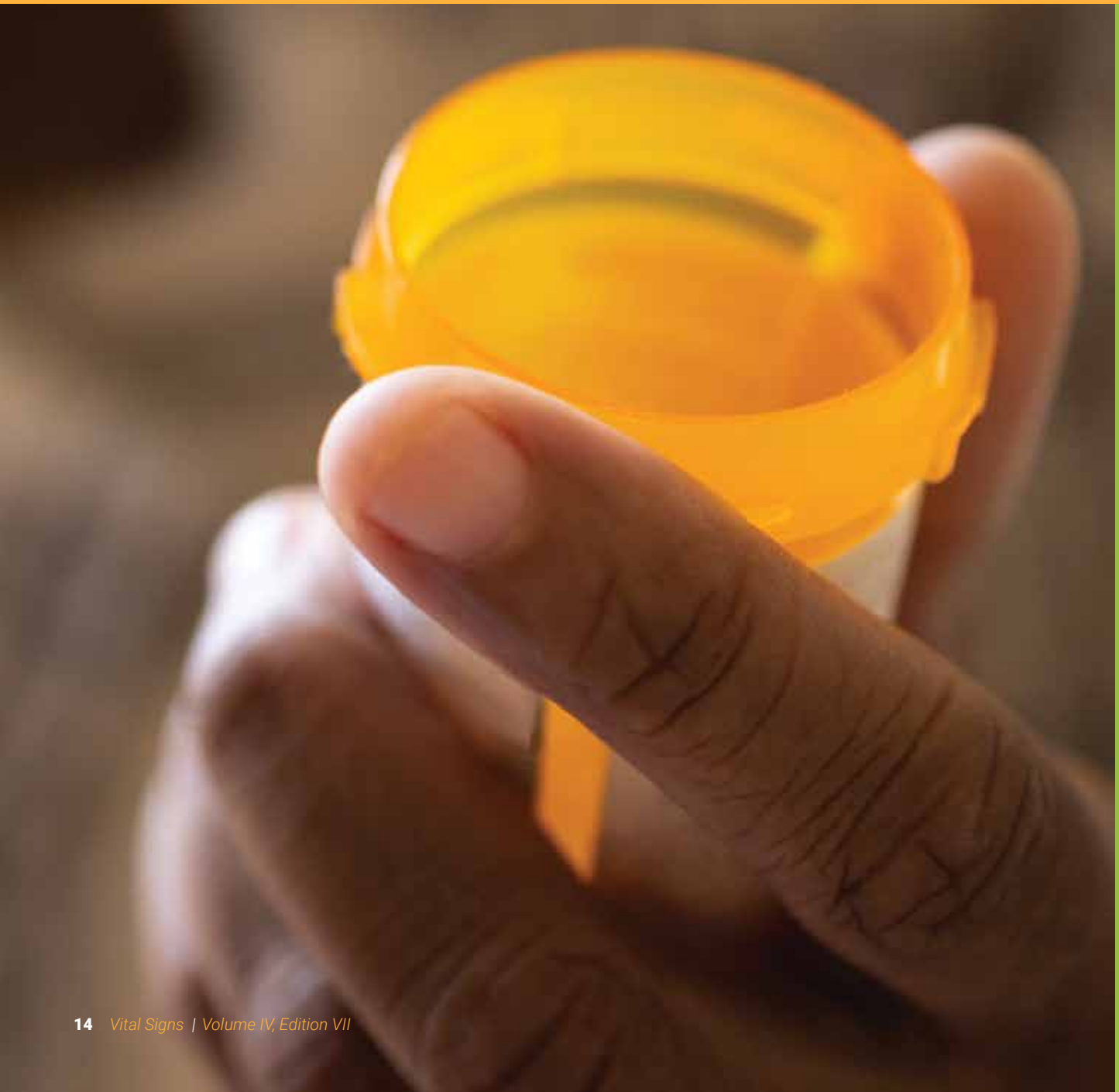
## **AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: HEALTHY MINDS POLICY INITIATIVE**

### **Oklahoma's thought leader for transforming mental health policy**

Healthy Minds Policy Initiative is a non-partisan think tank focused on mental health issues in Oklahoma. Founded in 2019, their mission is to end untreated mental illness and addiction in Oklahoma through policy and practice transformation. Healthy Minds' research, policy analysis, and statewide partnerships shape how Oklahomans understand and respond to the mental health crisis.

In 2023, Healthy Minds received a United Way of Central Oklahoma WayFinder grant. This grant provides seed money to fund innovative ideas that do not exist in Central Oklahoma. The award-winning idea: transforming Oklahoma City's approach to mental health.

As identified by Healthy Minds, Oklahoma City is lacking a detailed, city-wide plan for tackling systemic behavioral health problems. With assistance from United Way and other partners, Healthy Minds will develop a high-impact community leadership team with the goals of developing a strategic vision for addressing mental health, understanding the most urgent challenges and what opportunities may exist, and building capacity to make system-level improvements that benefit the Oklahoma City community.

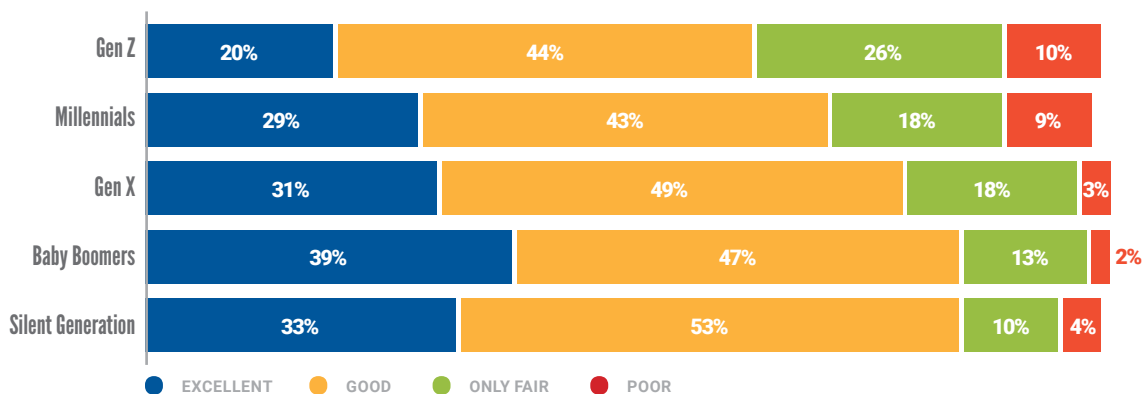


# WHO DOES MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IMPACT?

In a Gallup/Walton Family Foundation poll, respondents were asked to rate their overall mental and emotional well-being. The percentage of those responding Only Fair or Poor was highest for the youngest generations with 36% of Gen Z responding in these two categories.<sup>9</sup>

## Generational Differences in Overall Mental and Emotional Well-being

*How would you describe your own mental health or emotional well-being at this time?*



**Note:** Results for Gen Z cohorts are based on a separate web survey conducted with members of the Gallup Panel in February 2023. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%

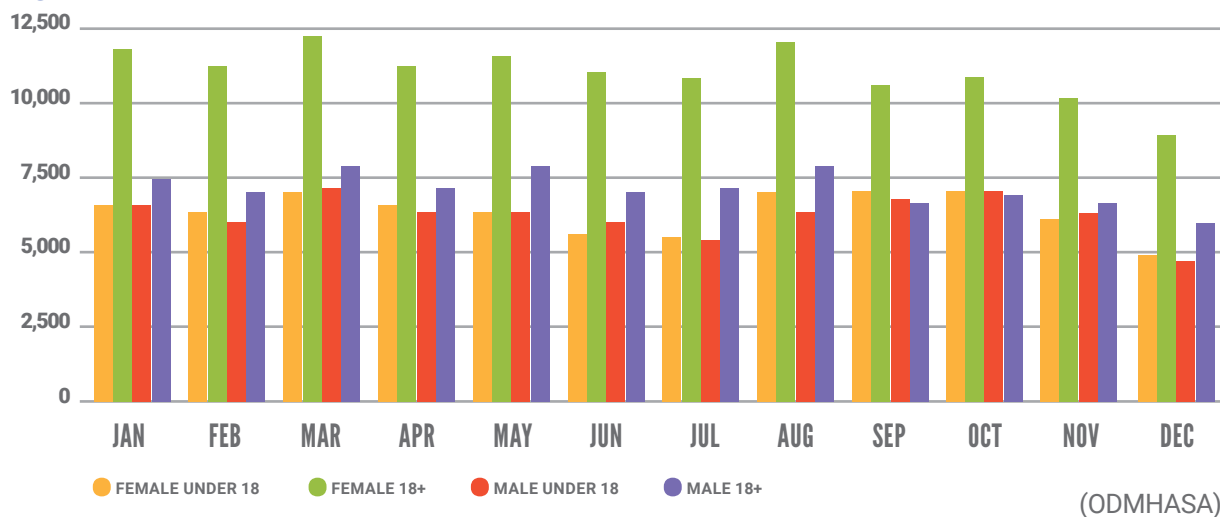
*Oklahoma's rate of mental illness is higher than the national average.<sup>10</sup>*



In 2023, unique mental health admissions in the state were 115,994 for adults 18 and over. Unique mental health admissions were 80,866 for children under the

age of 18. Overall, unique mental health admissions were 196,856 for the state.<sup>11</sup>

### Age and Gender Breakdown in 2023



## CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENTS

**Adverse Childhood Experiences, ACEs**, are events in childhood (birth to 17) that have potential for traumatic impact on the development of the child.

**ACEs** fall into three categories: abuse, neglect and household dysfunction. Abuse includes physical, mental and sexual components. Neglect is the absence of basic life essentials such as food, shelter and human connection. Household dysfunction can take on many forms. Domestic violence is a common form of household dysfunction, as is substance use and mental illness. Divorce or incarceration of a parent that removes them from the child’s life also have a traumatic impact. This category also included community violence that children witness or perceive to threaten their security.

**ACEs** do not simply go away once someone becomes an adult. In fact, chronic health issues such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder (COPD), heart conditions, autoimmune issues and diabetes are shown to occur at higher rates in those with high **ACEs**. Lifespan is decreased as a result of

the consequential risks associated with high **ACE** scores. The Centers for Disease Control estimate that preventing **ACEs** could reduce up to:

- 21 million cases of depression
- 1.9 million cases of heart disease
- 2.5 million cases of overweight/obesity

The holistic care of children requires integrated care of mental and physical health issues, and support for basic needs of life: food, shelter and human connection. School is the safe harbor for many students. However, school can be a challenging place for many others. Peer pressure, the demands of rigorous academic and extra-curricular activities, and threats such as school shootings and bullying behavior, both physical and cyber, result in school being a place of significant stress. The impact of **ACE** prevention can be seen throughout the lifespan in the reduction of health conditions, risks and socioeconomic challenges.<sup>12</sup>





## Health Conditions

Health conditions that could be reduced by the following amounts with adverse childhood experiences prevention.



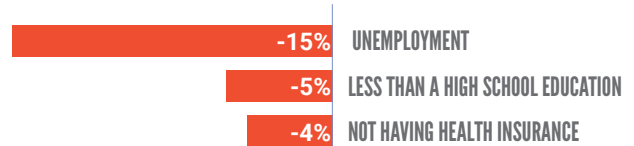
## Health Risk Behaviors

The potential reduction of negative outcomes in adulthood.



## Socioeconomic Challenges

The potential reduction of negative outcomes in adulthood.



Source: Centers for Disease Control

## AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: THE CARE CENTER

**We educate. We heal. We listen.**

The CARE Center, organized in 1991, is Oklahoma County's only child advocacy center. Their mission is to prevent and help all children experiencing abuse including neglect, physical, sexual, witness to violent crimes or murder, drug endangerment and human/sex trafficking.

Their end goal is eradicating child abuse in all forms. Stacy McNeiland, The CARE Center's CEO, is a tireless child advocate and Founder of the ROAR educational program.

The CARE Center utilizes a multi-disciplinary team that provides holistic care to victims of abuse. The CARE Center campus, designed to look like a cozy neighborhood, houses law enforcement investigators, child protective service workers, assistant district attorneys, medical professionals, mental health professionals, and family advocacy personnel on the investigation, treatment, and management of child abuse cases.

The CARE Center has two educational programs in their fight to end child abuse. Recognizing & Reporting Child Abuse & Neglect is a child abuse education training designed for any adults who work directly with children. ROAR is The CARE Center's child-based education program that teaches children ages 4-8 how to protect themselves from abuse. ROAR is endorsed by the Oklahoma State Department of Health, the Oklahoma State Department of Education and supports Erin's Law, which requires all public schools to have a child sexual abuse prevention program.

## COLLEGE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

As children reach the age of adulthood, they are faced with a myriad of decisions about their future, further education, career choices, where to live and choice of a life partner. At the same time, they have a host of new freedoms as well. The external control of childhood melts away and restraints on destructive behaviors are no longer present in the same form. The intersection of decisions and freedoms can result in substance abuse, anxiety, depression and multiple types of addictive disorders.

The National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics reports:<sup>13</sup>

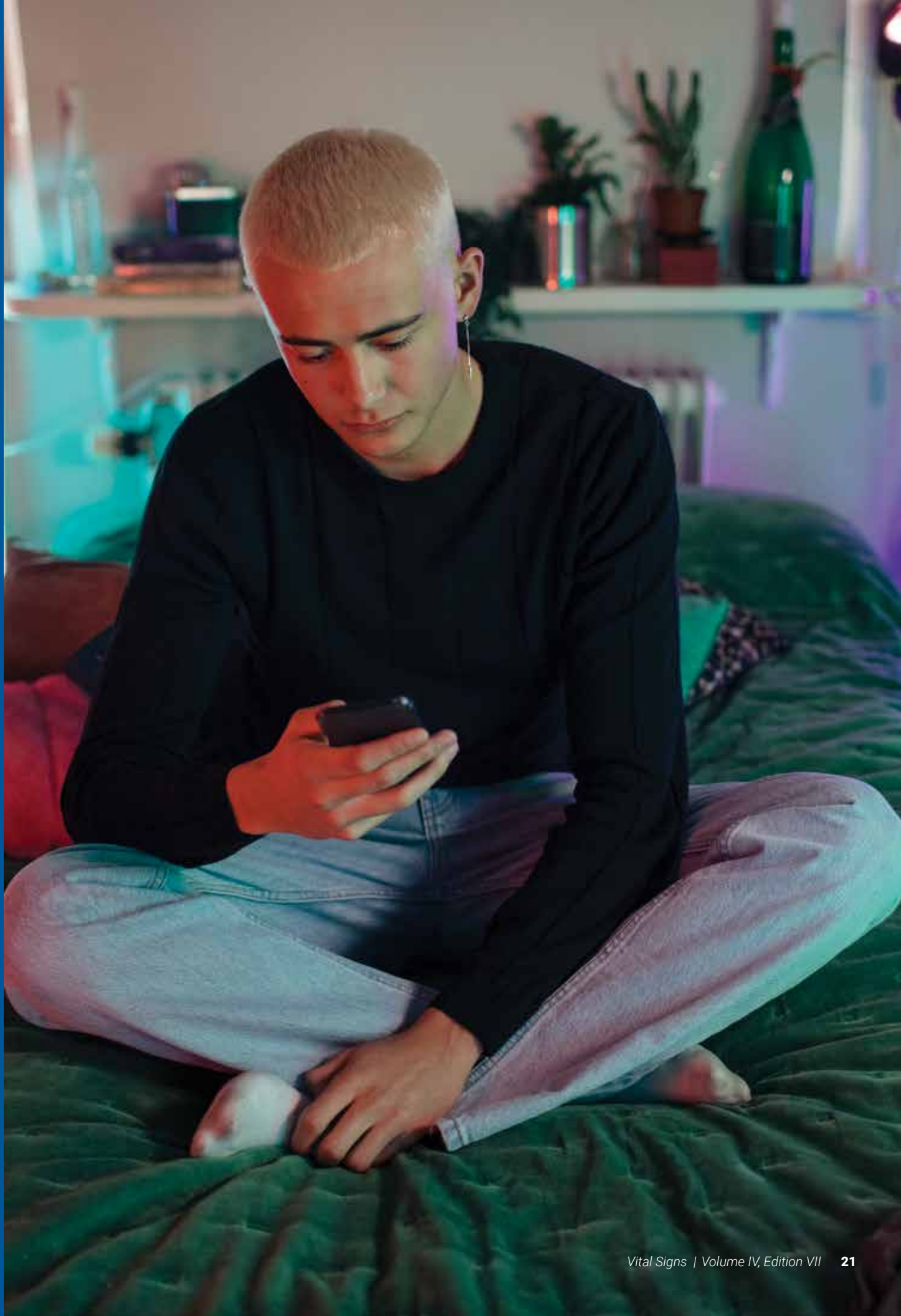
- Drug use is highest among persons aged 18-25 at 39% compared to persons aged 26-29, at 34%.
- 70% of users who try an illegal drug before age 13 develop a substance abuse disorder within the next 7 years compared to 27% of those who try an illegal drug after age 17.
- 35% of college students indicated they use illegal drugs instead of prescription drugs.
- 93% of college students who use illegal drugs use marijuana.

## ADULTS

As people settle into adulthood, they are faced with multiple stressors. Common events with this age group would include buying a home, having children and advancing in their career. However, the lasting impacts of COVID magnify the normal stress that goes with these aspects of life.

While unemployment is low, the rate of inflation outpaced wage growth for more than two years between spring of 2021 and spring of 2023.<sup>14</sup> The financial impact of high inflation and a lack of affordable housing causes financial stress on young families to make ends meet. This magnifies the

stress of child bearing on both parents when leave is limited and finances are tight. The hormonal changes of pregnancy and childbirth impact mental well-being, leading to postpartum depression. Oklahoma's rate of postpartum depression, at 16.1%, is above the national average of 12.7%.<sup>15</sup> Affordable childcare in Central Oklahoma has become difficult to obtain and the loss of community bonds decreases the social safety net when a child becomes ill and parents lack the necessary time off to care for them. The stress can lead to mental illness and substance abuse.





## WORKPLACE

Work plays an important role in mental health. In fact, recent research found that managers have a greater impact on a person's mental health than does their doctor or their therapist and is equal to their partner or spouse.<sup>16</sup> Other notable findings include:

- 1 in 3 workers stated that managers fail to recognize the impact they have on mental well-being.
- Nearly 3 in 4 said stress from work negatively impacted their home life.
- 2 out of 3 would take a pay cut for a job that better supported mental health.

## SENIOR ADULTS

Mental health of our elders is impacted by multiple factors. Economic insecurity continues to be a challenge and may be increased due to the rise in gray divorce, divorce between couples 50 and older. Declining vision may lead to limiting driving to daytime hours or forfeiture of driving privileges.

## VETERANS

Our community members who chose to serve us all by enlisting in the armed services often return home with unique emotional scars from their experiences in the military. Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders are often coupled with physical infirmities that leave Veterans unable to function in society. Left untreated, many of our Veterans turn to suicide before a mental health issue is ever noted by a health care professional. Homelessness is also a repercussion from the inability to cope and difficulty in finding employment.

- 70% want their employer to do more to support their mental health.

Research also noted that management is largely unaware of the impact of working for their organizations. Nine in 10 human resource and C-suite leaders stated that working for their company had a positive impact on employee mental well-being. Only 64% of employees shared their view.<sup>16</sup> While many employers offer Employee Assistance Programs, the wait times can be lengthy and the services often are insufficient for the mental health needs of the employee and their family.

Hearing loss impacts personal communication abilities, and when coupled with the impacts of vision decline, can lead to social isolation. Social isolation is intensified by the death of peers and the distance of family members.

Veterans with mental health issues often require specialized services due to the distinctive nature of the trauma they experience in the line of duty. They also experience high levels of stress as they transition from the collectivist culture of the military to more individualistic life patterns in civilian life. Stress easily morphs into more complex behavioral issues when connections are not made. It is estimated that less than half of military members engage with available resources in a timely fashion.<sup>17</sup>

# HOW DOES MENTAL ILLNESS IMPACT OUR COMMUNITY?

Mental health impacts our communities at the core of their being: people. People are impacted by the destruction of the closest ties that make community. The destruction can be measured by the conflict within families, rates of domestic abuse, child abuse, and the impact of incarceration.

The impact of mental illness on our communities can also be measured in the economic costs that represent the lives that are hampered by impaired potential of human beings.

## *The Ripple Effect of Mental Illness*



Source: SAMHSA

## HUMAN IMPACT

### **FAMILY**

Families are damaged by the impact of poor mental health.

- Lack of or improper diagnosis of mental illness or substance abuse disorders results in parental behavior that leaves childrearing to grandparents or the foster care system.
- Oklahoma is the third highest state in the nation in rates of incarceration for women, which results in children requiring care from these sources.
- Oklahoma leads the nation in the rates of domestic violence. Mental health is frequently related to these rates.

This is a vicious cycle where high ACEs often lead to the children growing up with mental health issues and subsequent behavior issues, further raising the need for care.

As we've seen in high ACEs, the stability of the family

unit is a primary factor in the overall well-being of children that lingers throughout life. Children of parents with mental health issues are twice as likely to have mental health struggles when they reach adulthood in comparison to those whose parents do not have mental health issues.<sup>18</sup>





## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Oklahoma is 1st in the nation in rates of domestic violence.<sup>19</sup> In Oklahoma, 40% of women and 38% of men experience domestic violence in their lifetimes.<sup>20</sup> Domestic violence includes: physical abuse, emotional abuse, stalking, intimate partner rape, and murder. In fact, Oklahoma ranks 2nd in the United States for the number of women killed in a single victim/single offender homicide.<sup>21</sup> However, domestic violence does not just impact adults.

## ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The data surrounding economic burden can seem insensitive to the pain, struggle and loss associated with mental illness. If the numbers can be seen as the vast amount of people hurting, they can be useful in demonstrating the magnitude of need. Society as a whole suffers the cost of lost productivity, loss of community ties and the direct cost of disability payments to those who cannot work as a result of their mental illness. Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) saw psychiatric disabilities as the largest contributor to growth in the program in the early 2000s.<sup>24</sup> Psychiatric disabilities including depression, bipolar, or psychotic disorders accounted for 18% or 1.4 million of SSDI beneficiaries.<sup>25</sup> The mental

## INCARCERATION

Mental health impacts those who are incarcerated and those who are impacted by the incarceration. Previous trauma's impact on a person and resulting mental health issues are contributing factors to criminal behavior. Statistics show that individuals with high ACE scores and who experience generational poverty have higher rates of mental health issues and incarceration.<sup>26</sup> By addressing the profound impacts of these stressors, the rate of incarceration, and the cost associated with it, will fall. Those who are incarcerated have families who are impacted by their absence. Spouses lose financial support. Children lose a parent. Their behavior also leaves trauma that has long-lasting impacts on

Children are often physically harmed, too. The Oklahoma Domestic Violence Fatality Review reports that children age 5 and under represent the largest age group of children killed in domestic violence incidents.<sup>22</sup> Children who have experienced violence demonstrate higher risk for mental illness and experience adverse impacts in all areas of life well into adulthood.<sup>23</sup>

health category as a whole accounted for 29% or 2.4 million people receiving SSDI benefits.<sup>18</sup> This number is more than those collecting benefits due to workplace injury, cancer and diseases of the circulatory system and nervous system, combined. By addressing mental health issues, the cost of disability payments would be reduced and many members of our community could be returned to full, productive lives.

Not all costs to society can be as clearly calculated as SSDI benefits. The lack of care and inadequate care of mental illness leads to increased rates of incarceration and homelessness.

their families. It is estimated that 11% of Oklahoma children will have a parent incarcerated during their childhood.<sup>27</sup> Many of these children end up in the foster care system.

Oklahoma's foster care system is overburdened. When there are insufficient foster families, children in the system may be forced to sleep in offices or placed in group homes. The inherent fear when a child is removed from their home can lead to physical altercations between children in group homes. If the child is old enough, they can be charged as a juvenile and enter the juvenile justice system. At that point, there are few options in foster placement. Among incarcerated individuals in America, one in five spent

time in foster care or an institution during their childhood.<sup>28</sup>

It must also be noted that the victims of the crimes committed suffer trauma as a result of the crime committed against them. Physical and sexual assault victims also have the physical trauma in addition to the mental. Adult victims also have the economic impact of time away from work to consider.

When the far-reaching impact of mental health within the justice system is considered, mental health care has the opportunity to prevent future victims and to offer healing care to those impacted by criminal behavior.

The human impact of incarceration is devastating to individuals, families, victims and communities, but what is the economic cost to society? The Oklahoma Department of Corrections shows actual expenditures for 2022 range from just over \$60 a day

### IMPACT IN THE WORKPLACE

Mental illness does impact our places of work. The individuals who work with those with mental illness can be negatively impacted by their inability to maintain healthy relationships and to perform their assigned tasks. At times, the mental or behavioral issues can pose a safety risk. The organization is impacted by the loss of productivity, efficiency, and the cost of employee turnover. The large chunk of time most people spend at work cause this to be a key area of concern when we address the identification and intervention of mental health issues. The estimated cost of untreated mental illness in the United States is \$193.2 billion.<sup>30</sup>

Employers face significant losses from untreated mental illness. Employee turnover and the cost of

for minimum security to \$133.66 a day for maximum security.<sup>29</sup>

### Economic Burden of Incarceration to Society

SECURITY LEVEL	DAILY RATE	ANNUAL RATE
Maximum	\$133.66	\$48,785.90
Medium	\$63.24	\$23,082.60
Minimum	\$60.96	\$22,250.40
Community	\$83.62	\$30,521.30

The true cost is difficult to calculate when consideration is given to lost productivity, cost of property crimes, community safety and fear, personal anguish, destroyed lives, and lives lost to the behavior that leads to incarceration.

onboarding is a major expense. The turnover does have less visible costs such as the loss of knowledge an employee takes with them when they leave and the additional hours it takes a new employee to complete work as they learn their new position.

Employees with untreated mental illness that remain with a company incur losses too. Healthy Minds Policy Initiative records employees with depression are absent an average of 31 days a year and their lower rates of productivity computes to the loss of another 28 days of work.<sup>31</sup> Lost productivity is not restricted to the employee but to other members of the organization who rely on the work they do to complete their tasks as well.





# WHAT ARE WE DOING TO HELP?

Interventions can occur in many places and many forms. For some, it is lifestyle adjustments such as good sleep hygiene. For others, professional support is necessary. This support comes in many forms by a continuum of professionals. It must also include legislative efforts and parity in payment rates for mental health by private insurance companies.

## INTERVENTIONS

Interventions are a combination of public, private and nonprofit agencies coming alongside those who suffer from behavioral health issues. These

efforts aid in the healing of people, their loved ones and our community.

## STATE

The 2023 Oklahoma legislative session saw the passage of several new laws that will fortify the ongoing efforts to tackle the mental health crisis in Oklahoma. Several addressed the issue of ensuring access to care from insurance carriers by requiring them to arrange care if the subscriber cannot locate care on their own and paying the in-network rate when they do so.

The shortages in the behavioral health workforce were given attention with new laws that established the Behavioral Health Workforce Development Fund and Oklahoma State University Medical Authority Behavioral Health Workforce Development Fund<sup>32</sup> to retain existing professionals and support those who want to gain further education. However, only one received funding to ensure the law goes into effect. A separate law was enacted to establish the Counseling Compact, which facilitates interstate practice of behavioral health professionals who move into Oklahoma but are licensed in another state.

Legislators also passed a 5.6% funding increase for the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS).<sup>33</sup> The governor opted not to sign the bill but allowed it to go into effect on July 1, 2023. ODMHSAS is the only state agency dedicated to the prevention and treatment of mental health and substance abuse in the state of Oklahoma.

On September 11, 2023, ODMHSAS announced the construction of a new mental health hospital on the OSU/OKC campus to be named the Donahue Behavioral Center. The new facility will offer 330 mental health beds, a 100-bed increase. It will include a wide variety of innovative mental health services for adults and children.

This new state-of-the-art facility will offer an array of innovative services that Oklahomans rely on during their most vulnerable moments. Care will include care for adults and children, referrals to outpatient services and the most acute care services offered.

## OKLAHOMA CITY

The Oklahoma City Council presented and the voters approved MAPS 4 on September 14, 2021.<sup>35</sup> A component of MAPS 4 was a series of proposals to address mental health and substance abuse needs. The package, projected at \$44.6 million, would fund:

- \$11 million for construction of two new mental health crisis centers
- \$22 million for a “Restoration Center”

## 988

The Federal Communications Commission designated 988 to be the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline in July 2020.<sup>36</sup> This allowed quick, easy access to a network of over 200 state and local call centers across the United States run by Vibrant Emotional Health and funded through the Substance Abuse Administration, a part of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The establishment of 988 allowed mental health crisis needs to be handled directly by a mental health professional. It can help divert calls away from the 911 emergency response system, thus preventing the potential for negative outcomes when police respond. Mental Health America notes that people with mental health issue are 16 times more likely to be killed in a police encounter than those who do not have a mental illness.<sup>37</sup>

## 211

A similar support offering localized services is 2-1-1. A call to 211 is confidential and offers personalized response to the individual need. It began in 2000 to offer referrals to social services and other supports

- \$7 million for housing residents experiencing mental illness and homelessness as they transition out of a crisis center.

It also funded a new Senior Wellness Center and provided funding to supplement low income senior adults in the community to utilize the Centers. These centers provide for physical, mental and emotional health initiatives for a quickly growing segment of Central Oklahoma’s population.

It is projected that 988 will handle 13 million callers by 2025.<sup>38</sup> The professionals who receive the calls can effectively stabilize the situation, develop a plan of treatment with the caller or connect them with appropriate services and support that may include deployment of a mobile mental health crisis team. Only 2% of the calls require emergency services to be dispatched.<sup>39</sup> The result is a positive outcome for the caller, a reduced burden on the 911 system and a cost savings to society.

Each state must pass funding mechanisms to fully implement the appropriate mental health services across a continuum of care. Once full implementation is reached, equitable response to mental health care needs will allow for services and supports to be received in the places where people live, enabling the support of their communities.

in the community. It is staffed with trained personnel from the community served. Nationally, 211 responds to 21 million requests annually.<sup>40</sup>





## **CERTIFIED COMMUNITY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CLINIC**

A Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) is a model of care that includes coordinated comprehensive behavioral health care. There are several important features to note. First, they must provide 24 hour, 7 days a week crisis care. CCBHCs must provide services to anyone who requests mental health or substance abuse care regardless of age, place of residence or ability to pay. Specialized services for youth and children are necessary to receive this distinction.

CCBHCs coordinate the array of care needed so that people do not have to piece together a care plan; it is done for them by the CCBHC. The comprehensive aspect of the care plan requires these clinics to provide mental health, physical health and social services.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration lists nine core services a CCHBC must be able to directly provide or through a formal partnership.

### *CCBHCs Provide Nine Core Services Directly or Through Formal Partnerships*

**Outpatient Mental Health & Substance Use Services**

**Person & Family Centered Treatment Planning**

**Peer, Family Support & Counselor Services**

**Targeted Case Management**

**Outpatient Primary Care Screening & Monitoring**

**Community-Based Mental Health Care for Veterans**

**Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services**

**Screening, Diagnosis & Risk Assessment**

**Crisis Services**

CCHBCs qualify for enhanced Medicaid reimbursement rates. Oklahoma currently has 13 accredited Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics in the state and 4 in Central Oklahoma: Central

Oklahoma Community Mental Health Center, Hope Community Services, NorthCare and Red Rock Behavioral Health Services.

## AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: NORTHCARE

### STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES BY IMPROVING HEALTH AND SAFETY, ONE FAMILY AT A TIME.

NorthCare is a leading provider of integrated behavioral health services for Oklahomans living with mental illness, trauma, and addiction. NorthCare is one of first three centers in Oklahoma designated as a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC). Their philosophy, guided by the five trauma-informed principles, is to provide expert, comprehensive behavioral health treatment to Oklahomans by offering:

**CHOICES** for an individualized approach that addresses specific concerns and needs.

**EMPOWERMENT** by setting individual goals to increase personal responsibility and achieve objectives.

**COLLABORATION** to ensure that you and our team of experts are real partners.

**SAFETY** to support a safe and welcoming environment.

**TRUST** that we will provide continuity of care and navigation to address your whole health needs.

NorthCare also operates a Mobile Crisis and Outreach Team, called Champions. Champions operates 24/7 and offers community-based intervention to individuals in need wherever they are, including at home, work, or anywhere else in the community where the person is experiencing a crisis. They often partner with law enforcement efforts to provide specialized care to community members in need. CHAMPIONS Team responds to 988 calls as well as assists first responders seeking co-response, consultation, and/or behavioral health supports.

NorthCare is a place for hope and recovery. Known locally and nationally, the center delivers innovative and effective services for individuals and families.

## SCHOOL-BASED INTERVENTIONS

### END BULLYING

The National Center for Education Statistics surveys students for instances they have had rumors spread about them, have been made fun of, called names, or been insulted; being excluded from activities on purpose; being pushed, shoved, tripped or spit on; threatened with harm; being coerced into doing something they didn't want to do; and having their property destroyed on purpose. The report records that 1 in 5 students are impacted by bullying behavior at school.<sup>42</sup>

Cyberbullying is even more insidious. Pew Research Center surveyed students on behavior deemed as cyberbullying, which includes:<sup>43</sup>

- Offensive name-calling
- Spreading of false rumors about them
- Receiving explicit images they didn't ask for

- Physical threats
- Constantly being asked where they are, what they're doing, or who they're with by someone other than a parent
- Having explicit images of them shared without their consent

The Pew survey completed in 2022 reported that 46% of teens ages 13-17 experienced at least one of these behaviors and 28% reporting they had experienced multiple types of cyberbullying.

Bullying and cyberbullying have long-lasting impacts. Children who have been bullied are at higher risk of mental health issues when they are young. However, the lasting impacts have been noted in their health, employment, and earnings potential long into middle age.<sup>44</sup>





## INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a 250:1 student to counselor ratio. The ratio of counselors in school settings is 408:1 nationally.<sup>45</sup> The Oklahoma ratio at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year according to ASCA is 356:1, a slight decrease from previous years but still

well above the recommended ratio. Funding requests to increase the number of counselors in Oklahoma from the State Superintendent of Education was rejected by the state legislature in years 2018-2021 and no requests have been made since that time.<sup>46</sup>

## INCORPORATE A MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT (MTSS)

Mental health screenings incorporated into school settings also allows for early detection. School-based plans allow for tiered interventions based on need of student. The Baker Center for Children and Families has outlined Tier Support in the following manner:<sup>47</sup>

Tier 1 provides Universal Support and Screening for all Students. This requires a low intensity of supports.

Tier 2 provides Targeted Supports for students

identified as at risk for a negative behavioral health outcome or who are experiencing mild to moderate concerns. This requires a moderate intensity of supports.

Tier 3 provides Intensive Supports for students with moderate to severe challenges. This requires a high intensity of supports.

## EMBRACEOKC

EmbraceOKC is a comprehensive approach to providing a school-based system of supports for Oklahoma City Public Schools' students and families. EmbraceOKC brings Oklahoma City Public Schools together with community partners United Way of Central Oklahoma, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber,

The Foundation for Oklahoma City Public Schools, the City of Oklahoma City, and the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse to provide high-quality tiered academic and behavioral strategies, and mental health services that range from prevention to treatment.<sup>48</sup>

## EXPAND PREVENTATIVE EDUCATION

Education programs that are age specific teach children how to protect themselves from abuse. The Care Center's ROAR program has educated approximately 85,000 children between the ages of 4 and 8.<sup>49</sup> The classroom learning is reinforced with take home materials. Bethesda's Stop, Go and Tell began in 2004 for Kindergarten through 5th grade students. They are currently working to develop curriculum for 6th through 8th grades.<sup>50</sup>

Prevention is the primary focus of collaborative care models. Prevention is possible in many of the issues seen in behavioral care settings. Early diagnosis is also a key aspect of decreasing the severity of symptoms and quicker recovery times. Psychotic illnesses are not preventable but early diagnosis is key to symptom management and overall outcomes.

Early detection is next. This begins with integrated mental health care in the primary care setting. Primary care providers can screen patients for mental health issues, which allows for early detection, rapid

referral when needed, and removes the stigma often associated with mental health needs. Ideally, mental health professionals would be incorporated in the



team of primary care providers for a seamless system of care without delays. While delaying treatment for most health concerns is recognized as harmful, the same is not necessarily true for mental health conditions.

An integrated or collaborative care model has multiple advantages and is widely recommended as a positive intervention in the mental health crisis we now face.<sup>52</sup> Integrated care allows primary and family care physicians to screen for mental health and substance abuse issues that may be present, much like many other screenings that take place in these practices. The stigma of seeking care is removed as privacy is maintained with the physician.

The physician has the option of prescribing pharmaceuticals or referring the individual to a mental health provider on the health team. This referral can take on the option of a 'warm handoff' where the patient is walked to the mental health provider inside the clinic, which ensures they receive treatment and overcomes the stigma often associated with seeking mental health care, particularly in rural areas.

The Mental Health Innovation Network reports that collaborative care is more cost effective than traditional models, with an estimated savings of \$6.50 for each dollar spent in the collaborative model.<sup>53</sup>

## **AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: VARIETY CARE**

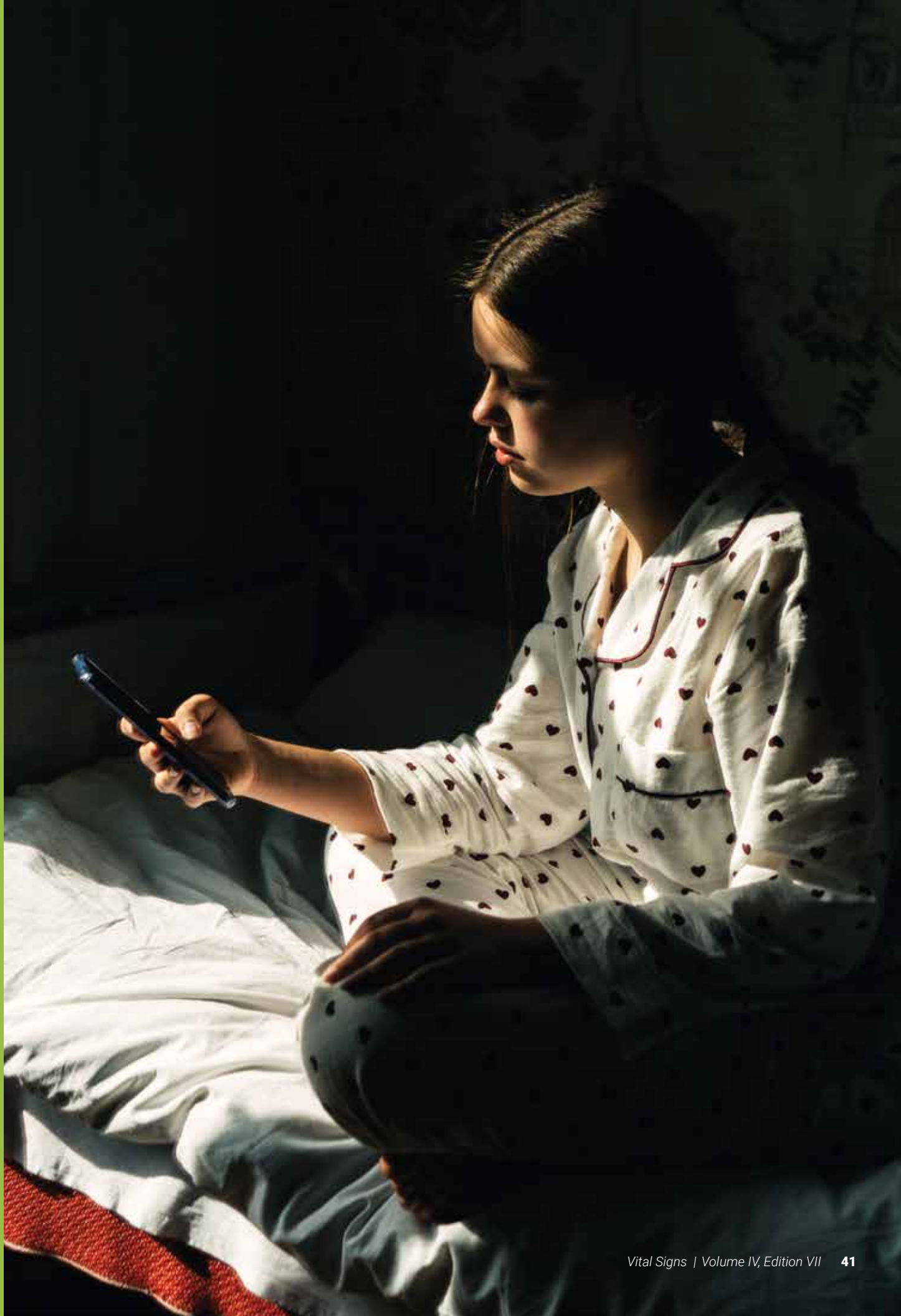
### **MAKING QUALITY HEALTH CARE AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL.**

Variety Care is all about health and health for all! Variety Care is Oklahoma's largest community health center, with 18 sites in central and western Oklahoma. They provide care to all persons, regardless of income, residency status, employment, health insurance coverage or ability to pay for services. You do not have to be a resident of any specific city, county, or area to access our services.

The success of integrated care is seen in this recent account of a Variety Care case manager: "I first met a 13-year-old through warm hand off/brief intervention request from her doctor on 7/11/23. This 13-year-old had recently disclosed to her parents that she had been sexually abused as a young child. As a result of these memories resurfacing, she was experiencing significantly distressing trauma symptoms which included suicidal ideation. During the brief intervention, I was able to educate the patient and mother on reporting protocol, provide pros and cons to mental health treatment as well as coordinate with the doctor to start an antidepressant that day. A follow-up visit with the doctor was scheduled to assess if medication was helpful as well as confirm reporting since they wanted to do this on their own behalf later that day. The doctor also placed a referral for counseling services.

Counseling services were started in August 2023. This patient's symptoms were creating problems with her ability to get along with others, school, family relationships and general happiness. The 13-year-old and her mom have reported a drastic benefit to her mood, ability to concentrate in school, involvement with family members and setting future life goals as of November."

Variety Care's Behavioral Health team is dedicated to improving the lives of adults and children through modern and effective methods that are right for you.





## DRUG AND MENTAL HEALTH COURTS

Adjustment to adjudication should include substance abuse and mental health courts to divert individuals into treatment programs rather than incarceration. These courts divert people into programs where public safety is secured while addressing the behavioral health needs present in order to reintegrate them into the community. The Department of Corrections indicates that 55% of all offenders have a mental health need. Incarcerated women have a mental health need rate 22% higher than men.<sup>54</sup>

When women are diverted to Treatment Court

programs it impacts the number of children in the already overburdened foster system. This limits further trauma to children and decreases the likelihood they will interact with the criminal justice system in the future. Treatment Court programs normally last 18 months so rapid reunification is possible, stabilizing the lives of countless children.

Oklahoma County has three separate treatment courts available: Mental Health Courts, Drug and DUI Courts and Veteran's Courts. Oklahoma County treatment courts have proven success.<sup>55</sup>

## TREATMENT COURTS<sup>56</sup>



Oklahoma County Treatment Courts move people back to productive lives, benefitting the individual, their families and the community. Treatment courts are much less expensive than incarceration. The average treatment court program costs

approximately \$5,000 per individual. The savings to the community is significant when we consider the cost of incarceration, which ranges from \$22,250 to \$48,785.29 and multiplied by the number of mentally ill currently in the justice system.

## COMMUNITY CENTERS

Community centers for children and senior adults can be used as places of support and community. Social isolation and loneliness are key factors in mental health conditions in senior adults. These centers allow for social programs to keep them engaged and also offer a place for physical and mental health checks to occur. They also offer the peer-to-peer support that has been proven to meet the needs of those in grief or other pain. Physical exercise and nutritional support, both factors in positive mental health, are also available at these centers. Physical exercise in the senior adult population has been proven to be beneficial to the prevention and treatment of senior adult mental health concerns. In fact, several studies have

shown that these interventions are paramount to the overall well-being of senior adults.

A sense of purpose is paramount to the mental health of our valued elders. Places for them to gather and transportation are interventions that have tremendous impact to them.

Depression in our elder community is exacerbated by declining hearing and visual acuity, which impacts their ability to travel, with loss of driving privileges. They continue to need a sense of purpose but these factors often impact their ability to undertake tasks to fulfill that need. Coping mechanisms and occupational therapy offer ways of traversing the world with minimal restrictions.

## CHILDREN

A factor often overlooked in the elder community is support for those who are now responsible for raising grandchildren. In 2021, there were 43,383 grandparents responsible for their grandchildren.<sup>57</sup>

Community centers such as Boys & Girls Clubs or the YMCA after school programs offer similar opportunities for school age children. They also offer positive role models for children who do

not have the parental support needed to build resilience and grit. It also offers more cost efficient after school care that benefits at-risk families in our communities. Similar to the senior adult centers, physical exercise and nutritional support needed for good overall health can be supplied at these sites.

## ALLEVIATING POVERTY

Poverty is a significant factor in overall well-being; mental health is a part of this equation. Poverty is a multi-faceted problem which allows for shallow solutions to be offered. It will require deep

interventions from a committed policy agenda to overcome the negative effects of a system that has fostered poverty that is transferred from generation to generation.

## CRISIS RESPONSE TEAMS

Mental health often plays a part in the calls placed to police and fire units. By implementing Mobile Crisis Teams, which include a licensed professional counselor and a lay support person, many of the calls that result in hospitalization or entrance into

the criminal justice system can be answered and stabilized without need for either option to be used. Approximately 70% of crisis situations can be stabilized at this point.<sup>58</sup>

## AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OKLAHOMA

### HOUSING. HEALING. WHOLENESS.

Mental Health Association Oklahoma is a United Way of Central Oklahoma Partner Agency that promotes the importance of addressing mental health care. As the agency's CEO, Terri White says, Mental Health Association Oklahoma's work happens at the intersection of mental illness and homelessness.

One way Mental Health Association Oklahoma works to address mental health and homelessness is with their Street Outreach program. The program works in a collaborative effort that deploys Mental Health Association Oklahoma staff throughout the city to build trust and connect individuals experiencing homelessness to valuable resources.

By building relationships and establishing trust with people, the Street Outreach staff have more success getting people connected to services, which means more success at helping people achieve stable housing to improve self-sufficiency and security.

After the program launched in 2019 as a United Way of Central Oklahoma WayFinder grantee, Mental Health Association's Street Outreach has connected hundreds of people to stable housing, connected them with mental health services and other services such as employment assistance or recovery programs.





## Depression Test

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

Please check all that apply and skip none.

1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things

None at all

Several days

More than half the days

None

2. Feeling tired, exhausted, or sluggish

None at all

Several days

More than half the days

None

3. Getting an uneasy, restless, or agitated sense of being

None at all

Several days

More than half the days

None

4. Having little energy

None at all

Several days

More than half the days

None

5. Thoughts of death or suicide, or thoughts of harming

None at all

Several days

More than half the days

None

6. A feeling of being slowed down or your thoughts

None at all

Several days

More than half the days

None

7. A feeling of being slowed down or your thoughts

None at all

Several days

More than half the days

None

## PARITY

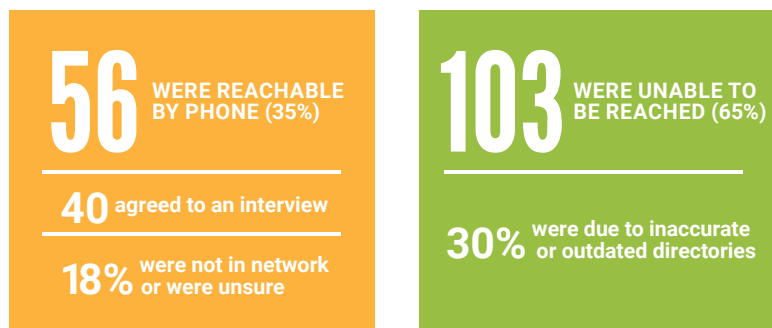
Mental health has long been seen differently than physical health in many respects including payment rates from insurance companies, Medicare and Medicaid. The Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA) was signed into law in 2008 to provide parity between mental health and substance abuse treatment and medical/surgical health care.<sup>59</sup> However, rules to implement the law were not released until November of 2013.<sup>60</sup> In July of 2023, a proposed rule change by the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services sought to close the loopholes that are used to deny access of coverage, but the changes do not go into effect until January 1, 2025 for group plans and

January 1, 2026 for individual plans.<sup>61</sup> As a result, parity issues remain problematic. One of the loopholes often used is the number of in-provider options available.

In February of 2023, Healthy Minds Policy Initiative (HMPI) released an in-depth analysis of the impediments Oklahomans face from their commercial health insurance in gaining mental health and substance abuse services. The research showed only 30% of available behavioral health providers were in network for insurance plans they surveyed. HMPI attempted to contact in-network providers listed in the directories of major insurance providers.<sup>62</sup> Their findings were troublesome.

## FINDINGS OF HMPI RESEARCH

### Calls made to 159 behavioral health providers revealed:



Parity in access is also a significant challenge in meeting the mental health needs of Oklahomans. Payment issues lead into access issues. Where a person lives also lends to access problems. Mental health workforce shortages are more pronounced in rural areas than urban, requiring a person in a mental health crisis to be transferred to an urban area away from their family and community. This removes them from two important components of positive mental health for everyone.

A significant factor in addressing mental health

issues is funding parity through Medicaid and Medicare. When mental health concerns are incorporated as part of overall health care coverages the reimbursement rates will enable many more to seek treatment for the challenges they face. Mental health care must be brought to the level of urgency that physical health needs routinely receive.

Poverty and the subsequent risks associated with it need to be addressed to provide people with the stability of a safe home, food to eat, and a community that cares for them.

## BARRIERS TO INTERVENTIONS

### STIGMA

Stigma is negative attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors about or towards a group of people because of their situation in life. It includes discrimination, prejudice, judgment, and stereotypes, which can isolate people.<sup>63</sup>

Stigma is often perpetuated by the stereotype of how a mentally ill person looks. The majority of individuals with mental illness show no visible signs. In fact, two-thirds of people with a known mental illness never seek treatment nor talk about their symptoms.<sup>64</sup>

Dr. Matt Brosi, Professor of Human Development

& Family Science at Oklahoma State University, addresses the need for conversations around mental illness and treatment in his presentation, “Mental Health Issues for Farmers, Their Families and Their Communities.”<sup>64</sup> Dr. Brosi speaks specifically to the ‘grit’ of Oklahomans and how that can work against us when we internalize the stress we’ve endured that then builds up over time and results in mental illness. By normalizing the conversation around mental health, the stigma can be addressed.

### BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE

Behavioral health professionals are not a one-size-fits-all profession. The degree of severity, along with any resulting addictions, requires different levels of intervention to stabilize and then to find a workable solution for returning the person to a full life.

Childhood mental health issues have received more attention since the onset of the COVID pandemic. Anxiety and depression are at all-time highs while the student to counselor ratio in most schools is well above the national recommendation of 250:1.<sup>45</sup> Funding is frequently cited as an issue in staffing at the recommended levels, but workforce availability

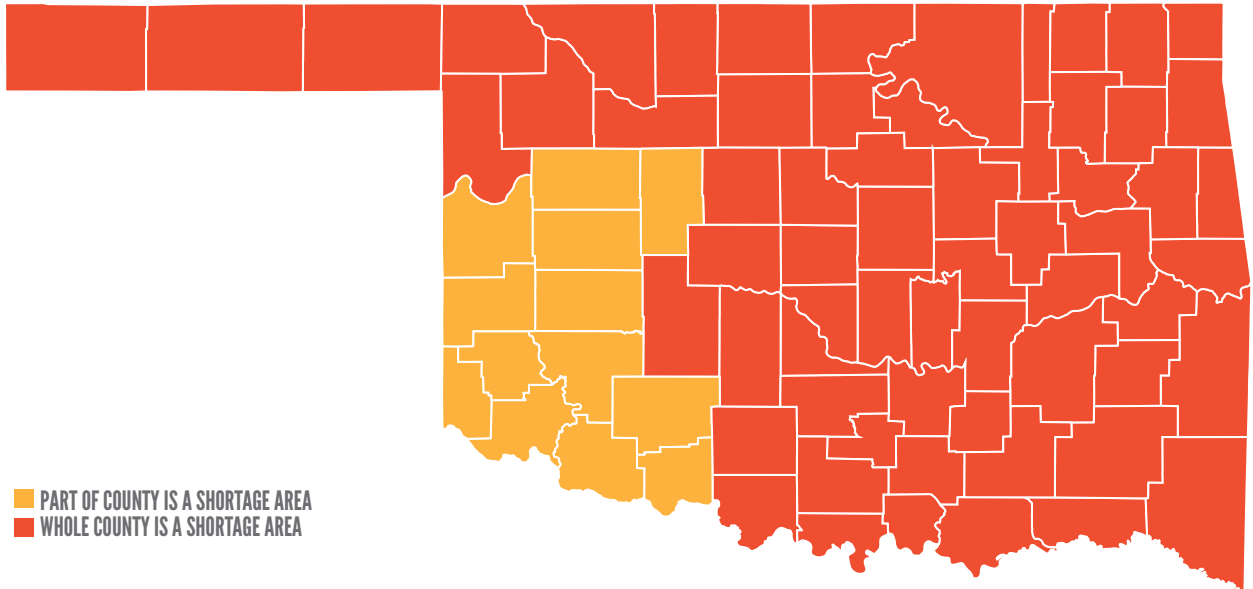
is also an issue. School-based counselors face extensive certification requirements that limit the number of people who undertake the task.

Workforce availability is not only a challenge in school counseling. Oklahoma has documented shortages of mental health care professionals at most tiers of care with licensed professional counselors being the only category that shows sufficient staffing levels. The mental health workforce’s challenge is amplified in rural areas, where overall availability of health care is challenged, but the shortages are statewide.<sup>65</sup>



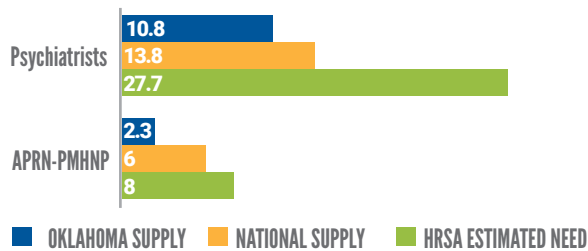


## HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE AREAS: MENTAL HEALTH, BY COUNTY, APRIL 2024 - OKLAHOMA



■ PART OF COUNTY IS A SHORTAGE AREA  
■ WHOLE COUNTY IS A SHORTAGE AREA

There are multiple factors that lead to the statewide shortages. Oklahoma’s providers receive lower reimbursement rates than national averages and is the lowest of all surrounding states.<sup>66</sup> Providers are only paid for the time they spend with patients, which lowers overall reimbursement rates when continuing education, researching treatment protocols and documentation are factored in. The time and cost discourages many from entering the behavioral health field.



In addition to the time and cost to become a psychiatrist, Oklahoma also has a limited number of residency placements for those who wish to enter the field. As a result, the number

of psychiatrists in Oklahoma is well below the nationally recommended ratios.

Oklahoma has a little more than 20% of the recommended APRN-PMHNP recommended. These practitioners are Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, who are accredited in a subfield known as PMHNP or psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners. APRN-PMHNPs are qualified to diagnose, treat and prescribe medications. They are a supplement to the prescribing and diagnosing functions that psychiatrists provide.

Increasing the number of Collaborative Care practices in Oklahoma would empower Primary Care Physicians to handle medication management for patients with mild and moderate mental health conditions. These practices could utilize psychologist and social workers to support the primary care providers and embedding them in the practice would ensure the warm handoff that greatly increases the likelihood of treatment.

# FINAL THOUGHTS

This edition of Vital Signs is sobering to read and even more difficult if you or someone you know is living through mental health or substance abuse disorders. Hope is on the horizon! We know what needs to be done and now we must act. Oklahoma has long been known for the 'Oklahoma Standard' of caring for our neighbor in times of crisis. As a community, it is now time to come together and restore all members of the community to a healthy and flourishing life!



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Partner Agencies

A Chance to Change

Areawide Aging Agency, Inc.

Bethesda

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Oklahoma

Boy Scouts of America, Last Frontier Council

Boys & Girls Club of Oklahoma County

Calm Waters Center for Children & Families

Camp Fire USA

The Care Center

CASA of Oklahoma County

Catholic Charities

Citizens Caring for Children

City Care, Inc.

Community Literacy Centers, Inc.

Daily Living Centers, Inc.

DRTC

D-DENT, Inc.

EARC, Inc.

Girl Scouts - Western Oklahoma, Inc.

Goodwill Industries of Central Oklahoma

Health Alliance for the Uninsured

HeartLine

The Homeless Alliance

INTEGRIS Hospice

John W. Keys Speech & Hearing Center

Latino Community Development Agency

Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma, Inc.

Mental Health Association Oklahoma

Metropolitan Better Living Center

Moore Youth & Family Services, Inc.

Neighborhood Services Organization, Inc.

NewView Oklahoma

NorthCare

Oklahoma Foundation for the Disabled

Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (OMRF)

Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care

Pivot, Inc.

Positive Tomorrows

Possibilities, Inc.

ReMerge

RSVP of Central Oklahoma, Inc.

The Salvation Army

Skyline Urban Ministry

Special Care, Inc.

Sunbeam Family Services, Inc.

The Education & Employment Ministry

Tinker AFB Youth Center

Upward Transitions

Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City

Variety Care

YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City

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This edition of Vital Signs was published in January 2024 and utilized vetted data prior to December 31, 2023.

United Way of Central Oklahoma's research team is committed to only presenting reviewed and vetted data to accurately provide readers with challenges and opportunities facing central Oklahoma.

United Way will continue to monitor reviewed data. We encourage you to visit [unitedwayokc.org/research](http://unitedwayokc.org/research) for updated data and reports as they become available.

# VITAL SIGNS

Central Oklahoma

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