

Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

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OKLAHOMA TREATMENT COURT PROGRAMS HONORED FOR ACHIEVEMENTS

A highly successful alternative-to-incarceration program that has put millions of dollars back into the state economy was in the spotlight recently at the state capitol.

Twenty-five graduates of the state's drug courts and mental health courts were honored at a commencement ceremony held April 15, followed by a rally and awards presentation recognizing county programs achieving outstanding results.

These "treatment" courts are considered to be among the most successful alternatives to incarcerating non-violent offenders with mental or addictive disorders, said Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Commissioner Terri White, whose agency oversees the program. Since FY2000, treatment courts – primarily drug courts – have produced a "cost avoidance" to the state of nearly \$332 million.

More than 10,000 Oklahomans have graduated from drug courts alone. Approximately 4,000 Oklahomans currently participate in the state's drug court program, which is located in 73 counties. Mental health courts exist in 16 counties with about 450 active participants. An additional 17 counties have requested funding to start mental health courts. ODMHSAS also oversees six family treatment courts and seven juvenile drug courts. Recently, courts have introduced unique dockets for populations such as Oklahoma veterans.

During the event, Oklahoma court programs received awards for outstanding performance, including courts from **Delaware, Ottawa, Payne, Pontotoc, Oklahoma** and **Tulsa** counties, and the **3rd Judicial District Drug Court**.

Treatment courts are part of ODMHSAS' "Smart on Crime" initiative, which includes cost-saving programs geared to address mental illness and addiction at a number of diversion points in the criminal justice process. These courts redirect certain non-violent drug offenders into a highly structured, judicially monitored treatment program rather than sending them to prison.

Outcomes show significant success rates in participants obtaining jobs, increasing income, reuniting with their children, and reduced recidivism compared to released inmates. Additionally, DOC spends \$19,000 a year on average to incarcerate someone; drug court costs \$5,000 a year.

One study found that 1,058 drug court graduates earned nearly \$35 million in total wages over a three-year period, and put more than \$2 million in total tax revenue back into the economy during that same

period. Had these same individuals been incarcerated during that period, it would have cost Oklahoma taxpayers \$60.3 million.

In addition to the graduation ceremony, several judges spoke and graduates shared their stories about how the program has changed their lives. Educational booths provided information about specific county programs.

Awards for outstanding achievement were presented to the following programs:

Delaware County Drug Court – Outstanding Improvement in Participant Employment (100% reduction in unemployment).

Oklahoma County Mental Health Court – Outstanding Reduction in Participant Jail Days (98% reduction in jail days).

Ottawa County Drug Court – Outstanding Completion Rates (86.3% completion rate).

Payne County Drug Court – Outstanding Performance in Reuniting Participants with Their Children (187.7% increase in reuniting participants with their children).

Pontotoc County Mental Health Court – Outstanding Improvement in Participant Employment (100% reduction in unemployment).

Tulsa County Mental Health Court – Outstanding Reduction in Participant Inpatient Hospitalization (51% reduction in inpatient days).

3rd Judicial District Drug Court – Outstanding Improvement in Participant Education (74.9% increase in participants receiving their GED or high school diploma at time of graduation.)

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Facts Related to Oklahoma Specialty Court Programs

Drug Courts: Statewide outcome comparisons for drug court graduates between entry and graduation:

- **Recidivism** – Drug court demonstrates significantly better outcomes for recidivism rates: 6.5% for graduates compared to 23.4% for released inmates.
- **Employment** – One of the aspects of drug court’s success in Oklahoma is the support participants receive in seeking, gaining and maintaining employment. At entry, 38% were unemployed, compared with only 2% at graduation. This is a reduction in unemployment of 94%.
- **Average monthly income more than doubled** – from \$771 a month at entry to \$1,575 at time of graduation. Many graduates also were able to obtain GEDs or pursue other educational alternatives while enrolled in drug court.
- The **percentage of children living with parents** increased from 37% at entry to 65% at graduation – an increase of nearly 74%.

- DOC spends on average \$19,000 a year to incarcerate someone. Drug Court costs \$5,000 a year.
- Since beginning in FY 2000, drugs courts have produced a cost avoidance to the state in excess of \$331.8 million.

Mental Health Court Outcomes: Effectiveness of courts can be demonstrated by (one year prior to admission and one year post-admission):

- 80% reduction in jail days
- 92% reduction in arrests
- 91% reduction in unemployment
- 80% reduction of days spent in an inpatient treatment setting
- The recidivism rate for mental health court graduates is extremely low. Among 434 graduates who have been out of the program an average of three years, only 3.2% had been re-incarcerated, compared with 23.4% of released inmates and 42% of released inmates with a serious mental illness.

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