
Investigation of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, and the Oklahoma City Police Department

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division

January 3, 2025

FINDINGS

The United States Department of Justice finds that the State of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, and the Oklahoma City Police Department (OKCPD) are violating federal law. Specifically, we have reasonable cause to believe that:

- Oklahoma unnecessarily institutionalizes, or puts at serious risk of unnecessary institutionalization, adults with behavioral health disabilities in the Oklahoma County area, in violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); and
- Oklahoma City and OKCPD engage in a pattern or practice of conduct that discriminates against people with behavioral health disabilities when providing emergency response services, in violation of Title II of the ADA and the pattern or practice provision of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994.

Every year, thousands of people with behavioral health disabilities are admitted to psychiatric hospitals in the Oklahoma County area, and hundreds experience repeat admissions within a year. Many also have long-term stays in nursing or residential care facilities. Most would prefer to live in their communities, surrounded by friends and family, and to have the freedom to make their own choices about their lives. These individuals could live successfully in their communities if they received critical community-based services that are proven to help people with mental illness avoid unnecessary stays in institutional settings. But Oklahoma does not provide sufficient services to prevent unnecessary hospitalization. As a result, many people with behavioral health disabilities never receive treatment until they are in crisis, often leading to avoidable hospitalization or contact with law enforcement.

For many in the Oklahoma County area, OKCPD is the agency they encounter. When a person calls 911 for help with a behavioral health issue, the City defaults to sending police as the sole responders in most cases. These calls for assistance would often be

most effectively resolved with a response by behavioral health professionals who can provide appropriate treatment, but the City rarely involves such professionals. And when OKCPD officers respond to situations involving behavioral health, they sometimes fail to help, escalate crises, or even unnecessarily resort to force. People do not get the help they need and then return to the hospital where the cycle began.

Together, the deficiencies in Oklahoma County's behavioral health service system and Oklahoma City's emergency response system lead to an unnecessary cycle of hospitalization and law enforcement contact.