

# HOW TO BE A MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE



## Mental Health Talking Points

### In Tulsa:

- Untreated mental illness costs the Tulsa community approximately **\$387.8 million** each year in direct and indirect costs, plus an additional \$5.2 million annually through the criminal justice system. (*Tulsa Mental Health Plan, 2018*)
- **1/3 of the 30,000 people** at the David L. Moss Criminal Justice Center who received medical care in 2016 did so for mental health reasons. (*Tulsa Mental Health Plan, 2018*)
- Locally, **suicide rates in Tulsa are among the highest in the United States**. According to a CDC report, Tulsa's suicide rate of 16.8 per 100,000 ranks it 15<sup>th</sup> among U.S. cities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018)

### In Oklahoma:

- Oklahoma has the **second highest rate of uninsured adults** in the United States.
- Oklahomans under age 18 have the highest rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in the country, with **20% of children** experiencing at least two of the 10 identified ACEs. The national average is 15%. (*America's Health Rankings, 2020*)
- Suicide is the **2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death** for ages 10-24. (*Oklahoma State Department of Health, 2018*)
- In 2017, there were **388 overdose deaths** involving opioids in Oklahoma, a rate of 10.2 deaths per 100,000 persons. Those involving heroin have increased threefold since 2011 from 17 deaths to 61 deaths in 2017. (*National Institute on Drug Abuse, March 2019*)
- In an annual assessment ranking the nation's health on a state-by-state basis, Oklahoma was **ranked 47<sup>th</sup>** on the basis of health outcomes, health behaviors, community & environment, policy and clinical care. (*United Health Foundation, 2018*)
- Oklahoma ranks **46<sup>th</sup> in the nation** in spending on mental health care. Without investment in health care, it is difficult and – at times impossible – for people with a mental illness to get treatment.

### Across the US:

- **Four in 10 U.S. adults** have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder during the COVID-19 global pandemic, up from one in 10 adults during 2019. (*Kaiser Family Foundation, 2021*)
- 2020 documented the **highest number of drug overdose deaths ever recorded** in a single year. (*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021*)
- Between 2007 and 2017, the number of **deaths attributable to alcohol increased** 35% (*USA Today, 2019*)
- **Nearly half of U.S. adults (46%)** have dealt with substance abuse problems in their family. (*2019 Gallup poll*)
- **2 in 3 Americans** think mental illness is a very serious public health problem, and few say (12%) there are adequate services and support in the U.S. for people living with it. Nearly 9 in 10 do think there is at least some stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness in society today. (*CBS News Poll, 2019*)



# OKLAHOMA MENTAL HEALTH STATISTICS AT A GLANCE



**6,000 OKLAHOMANS**

HAVE DIED FROM  
OPIOID OVERDOSES  
SINCE 2000

**HIGHEST RATE OF**  
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD  
EXPERIENCES IN  
THE COUNTRY



**SUICIDE IS THE 2ND**

LEADING CAUSE OF  
DEATH IN OKLAHOMA  
FOR YOUTH  
AGES 10-24

**OKLAHOMA SPENDS**  
LESS THAN HALF  
THE NATIONAL AVERAGE  
ON MENTAL HEALTH



**Parkside**  
Psychiatric Hospital & Clinic

## Mental Health Talking Points

### Video Resources

An invaluable way to learn more about mental illness – and to help tell stories that will touch people’s hearts – is to listen to the words of experts and the people who live with brain disorders every day. Below are some video resources that might be helpful in your work as an advocate.

- “A Tale of Mental Illness – From the Inside” by Elyn Saks, J.D., Ph.D:  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/elyn\\_saks\\_seeing\\_mental\\_illness](https://www.ted.com/talks/elyn_saks_seeing_mental_illness)
- “Toward a New Understanding of Mental Illness” by Thomas Insel, M.D.:  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/thomas\\_insel\\_toward\\_a\\_new\\_understanding\\_of\\_mental\\_illness](https://www.ted.com/talks/thomas_insel_toward_a_new_understanding_of_mental_illness)

### How to Find Your Representatives

- Find your state and federal legislators by entering your address here:  
<http://www.oklegislature.gov/FindMyLegislature.aspx>.
- Find your City Councilor here: <http://maps.cityoftulsa.org/citycouncil/>.

## How to Be an Advocate

### **Call, write to, or visit with your representatives.**

The single best way to make your voice heard is to contact your representatives, be they local or national. It may sound intimidating the first time, but remember that their job is to represent you and your priorities.

*(The following tips on writing, calling, and meeting are excerpts from the Tulsa Regional Chamber's Advocacy 101 training and used with their permission.)*

### **Tips on Writing to a State Legislator**

- A personalized message is ALWAYS better than a form letter.
- In a short first paragraph, state your purpose. Stick with one subject or issue. Support your position with the rest of the letter.
- If a bill is the subject, cite it by both the bill title/name and bill number.
- Be factual and support your position with information about how legislation is likely to affect you and others.
- If you believe that legislation is wrong and should be opposed, say so. Indicate the likely adverse effects and suggest a better approach.
- If you have any family, business, or political connection in regard to this issue, explain it. It may serve as identification when your point of view is considered.
- Reach out to a legislator early in the session before a bill has been introduced if you have some ideas that you would like to see included in legislation.
- Write the Chairperson or members of a Committee holding hearings on legislation in which you are interested. However, remember that you have more influence with legislators from your own district than any others.
- Also write about legislation of which you approve. Legislators hear mostly from constituents who are against something. A note of appreciation will make your legislator remember you favorably next time you write.

### **Tips on Telephone Calls**

- Telephone calls are extremely effective when you need to make your views known quickly and time isn't available to write a letter or email.
- When you call a legislator's office, you will be talking to a member of the staff who will most likely ask your name and address for future follow-up. In addition to letting him/her know how you feel, you can also ask questions to learn the legislator's position on an issue as well as how he/she plans to vote on a particular bill.
- Ask for the name of the specific staff person handling the issue you are interested in, and inquire if you may have their email address or contact information. Offer to be a resource to staffers, which is a great way to form a relationship.

## Mental Health Talking Points

### **Tips on Meeting a Member of Legislature or a Member of the Staff**

A personal visit with an elected official is an effective way to emphasize your interest in an issue or bill. Some tips for meeting a legislator to urge support or opposition to legislation:

- When making an appointment, state the subject to be discussed and identify persons who will attend, noting whether they are constituents.
- Select a spokesperson if others are going with you and agree on your presentation in advance of your meeting.
- Know the facts, both legislatively and related to your position. If discussing a bill, know the number and title.
- Present the facts in an orderly, concise, positive manner. Stay on the issue. Don't try to talk about too many different topics or your position may become confused.
- Relate the positive impact of legislation you support and the problems it corrects. If you are affected personally, tell them your story and how an issue will impact you, your child, or your family.
- Relate the negative impact of legislation you oppose and the problems it would create.
- Leave fact sheets if possible.
- Ask for favorable consideration, thank the legislator for his/her time and courtesy, and leave promptly.
- Be sure to get the name of the staff member covering your issue.
- Follow up with a note of thanks.
- You may end up meeting with a staff member instead of the Legislator if he/she is called away for votes or committee business. The staffer will convey your message to the Legislator.

### **Write a letter to the editor.**

- You can write to the Tulsa World's Letters to the Editor section by sending an email to: [letters@tulsaworld.com](mailto:letters@tulsaworld.com).
- Keep the letter short and on one topic. A good maximum is 250 words.
- Make sure to include your contact information.
- Read other letters for format here: <http://www.tulsaworld.com/opinion/letters/>.

### **Invite community leaders to Parkside.**

- If you meet any influential members of the community (such as legislators, funders, or other key leaders), invite them to learn more about mental health by touring Parkside.
- Contact Director of Fundraising Derek Frazier at [dafrazier@parksideinc.org](mailto:dafrazier@parksideinc.org) or (918) 586-4251 to schedule a tour.

## **Digital Resources.**

Check legislation and find legislators: [www.oklegislature.gov](http://www.oklegislature.gov).

Find your legislators by address: [www.oklegislature.gov/FindMyLegislature.aspx](http://www.oklegislature.gov/FindMyLegislature.aspx).

Find your City Councilors by address: <http://maps.cityoftulsa.org/citycouncil/>.

Twitter accounts to follow for detailed, quick news during session:

- @OKHouseofReps
- @OKHouseNews
- @GOPHouseOK
- @HouseDemsOK
- @OKSenateInfo
- @OKSenateGOP
- @OKSenateDems
- @JRLROK
- @eCapitol
- @eCapitol\_Shawn
- @okgov

Your representatives may also have a Facebook page that you can check for updates. Visit [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and search for their names.

Download the Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives (OAEC) app:

- Search legislative districts by map
- Easy info of statewide officials, state & federal legislators and legislative committees
- Legislative deadline calendar

Federal bill search: [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov).

To learn more about your elected officials' background and policies: <https://ballotpedia.org>.

To track a particular bill or a legislator's record: <https://www.billtrack50.com/>.

For more tips and sample language for writing to your legislators:

[http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/Write to your legislators April 2011.pdf](http://www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org/storage/documents/Write_to_your_legislators_April_2011.pdf)

*(Some of these digital resources came from the Tulsa Regional Chamber's Advocacy 101 training and are reproduced with their permission.)*