

TEACHING  
HOSPITALS  
of TEXAS

## From Early Identification and Intervention to Crisis Care, Texas' Public Hospitals Invest in Behavioral Health

JPS Health Network's behavioral health innovation increases access, reduces emergency department use, and improves care.

### PARTNERS IN IMPROVING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE

Texas' teaching and public hospitals have an instrumental role in the state's healthcare system. From teaching and training future healthcare professionals to creating and deploying programs to address healthcare challenges in their communities, these hospitals are essential for meeting the broad and varied care needs of the state's growing population.

Although these hospitals are not dedicated behavioral health hospitals, their emergency departments are often the front door for those needing behavioral health care, and their shared mission of providing timely, cost-effective care means that many are taking on the responsibility of investing in behavioral health care programs and services. The significant human and financial investments in these programs are evidence of their commitment to being prudent financial stewards and to serving their communities.

This series profiles some of the innovative programs and services that Texas' teaching and public hospitals are deploying to make behavioral health care timelier and more accessible for Texans of all ages and from all walks of life — children, adolescents, adults, seniors, veterans, those with serious and persistent mental illness, the unhoused, and those involved in the criminal justice system. Most of these programs and services are in partnership with local community-based organizations, and all deeply reflect the community's priorities and needs. Many also have vital financial support from the Texas Legislature.

This series is by no means comprehensive, but the intent is to demonstrate the range and variety of teaching and public hospitals' innovation, leadership, and investment to addressing the state's many behavioral health care challenges.

### Identifying the Community's Behavioral Health Needs

In its 2023 Community Health Needs Assessment, JPS Health Network — the public hospital district for Tarrant County, the third-most populous county in the state and one of the fastest growing — identified behavioral health as one of the county's top priority needs.

Approximately 15 percent of the county's population experiences frequent mental distress, and residents report an average of 4.5 poor mental health days each month. An additional 17 percent of Tarrant County residents report binge or heavy drinking. Nearly 21 percent of residents report that a health professional has told them that they have a depressive disorder, higher



than both statewide and national averages of 18.6 percent and 20.5 percent, respectively. At the same time, less than 5 percent of the county's residents reported visiting a mental health provider in 2021.

## Expanding the JPS Psychiatric Emergency Center

For 25 years, JPS' Psychiatric Emergency Center (PEC) has been the county's only emergency behavioral health care center for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. It is staffed 24/7 with psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, and behavioral health technicians and is open 365 days a year. It has approximately 20,000 patient encounters annually. Walk-in patients typically are seen and discharged in under 1 hour and 11 minutes, on average, making the PEC particularly effective in providing care when it's needed.

About 28 percent of PEC patients are admitted to the inpatient behavioral health hospital for further care. The remainder are referred to outpatient behavioral health care programs either at JPS or at a location of the patient's choosing. Regardless of where patients go for care, a JPS transition coordinator helps them with their follow-up care plan and maintains communication as they help coordinate all aspects of patients' post-visit care, including:

- Follow-up care
- Counseling services
- Insurance navigation
- Medication management
- Transportation to follow-up appointments
- Connection with long-term community resources

Nearly all the coordination happens through telehealth and remote connection allowing JPS to leverage patient connections and communication that best fits patients' needs.

**Data shows that JPS' approach to care works: JPS has achieved the state's lowest readmission rate for behavioral health patients.** Last fiscal year, just six percent of

behavioral health patients were readmitted, far below the state average of 22.2 percent. To continue to successfully meet increasing needs, the PEC is expanding.

In 2018, JPS sought voter approval for bond funding to expand the PEC, among other large-scale infrastructure and care investments, to help meet the county's unmet and growing behavioral health care needs. The project's total \$2.1 billion budget, including the PEC expansion, is jointly financed with bond funding and operating cash from JPS. Construction on the new PEC began in 2022, with the new center set to open its doors by the end of 2025.

Once completed, the PEC will be attached to JPS' current inpatient behavioral health hospital, allowing for a more seamless transfer of patients to inpatient care, if needed. The expanded PEC will be more than six times its current size, increasing from 12,500 to 75,000 sq. ft., and have three times the number of care spaces available currently as well as feature separate units for adult and adolescent behavioral health care. This expansion allows for future population growth expected in Tarrant County.

In addition, with the care space expansion, JPS anticipates that patients brought in by law enforcement to its involuntary clinic will be able to get the help they need even faster, and police officers will be able to return to active duty more quickly.



**“When we see a need, we fill that need, and this project speaks to our deep commitment to meeting the behavioral health needs of the communities we serve. From coordination with law enforcement to behavioral health care integration across our hospital and clinics, we’re taking a comprehensive approach to behavioral health care in Tarrant County.”**

**Zelia Baugh**

Executive vice president of Behavioral Health at JPS Health Network

“From the moment they enter a JPS clinic to coordinating their follow up care planning, we’re striving to meet our patient’s behavioral health care needs every step of the way. This isn’t a one-and-done approach to behavioral health care,” said Zelia Baugh, executive vice president of Behavioral Health at JPS Health Network.

JPS’ goal this year was to have at least 31.6 percent of its patients have their depression symptoms reduced by 50 percent after intervention. As of August 2024, 46.78 percent of patients were experiencing a 50 percent decrease in depression symptoms, as measured by the follow-up PHQ-9 assessment. Utilization of JPS’ acute care hospital, ER, and PEC for these patients has also decreased. Anecdotally, patients’ physical symptoms, such as blood pressure, and A1C levels, are also improving as is patient engagement in their care and treatment.

## **Comprehensive Behavioral Health Care Integration for Early Intervention**

Helping individuals experiencing a behavioral health care crisis is one JPS strategy. Another is helping people avoid crises to begin with. About four years ago, JPS introduced the Depression Response Program at its medical specialty and primary care clinics for those enrolled in one of the JPS Connection programs, a series of assistance programs for patients with incomes below the federal poverty income level who reside in Tarrant County. The program incorporates mental health screenings, care management, and follow-up care coordination and support.

Because of its documented success, in 2024, this program expanded to all JPS outpatient locations. The goal is for any JPS patient, regardless of their point of entry, to be screened for depression and given access to treatment at their primary care or specialty care visit. Patients initially are screened using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-2), a self-administered and validated tool designed to assess depression specifically.

**“JPS has made such great strides in meeting the behavioral health needs of Tarrant County. THOT applauds the hospital’s innovation, decisive action, commitment and demonstrated success in growing alongside the populations it serves to continue meeting those needs,”**

**Maureen Milligan, PhD**

President and CEO  
Teaching Hospitals of Texas

## About JPS Health Network



JPS Health Network is the public hospital district for Tarrant County. In addition to the Main Street campus that features the 582-bed John Peter Smith Hospital, an acute care facility, and the current psychiatric emergency center, JPS operates more than 40 specialty care clinics and care centers in the Fort Worth area. The hospital provides 10 physician residency programs, including psychiatry, and its five fellowship programs include behavioral medicine and child and adolescent psychiatry. JPS is a member of the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium.

## About THOT

Founded in 1986, THOT is the principal voice and advocate for health systems that teach the next generation of health professionals and who are united in their commitment to support policies and funding that will ensure healthcare access to all Texans.

THOT members' shared commitments include:

- Supporting access to care for all in our communities, with a special focus on vulnerable populations.
- Providing and coordinating essential community health services, such as trauma and disaster management.
- Preparing for the future by training tomorrow's healthcare providers and supporting health research and healthcare transformation.

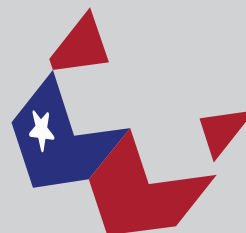


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