

Texas' Teaching Hospitals Partner to Transform Behavioral Health Care and Access in the Permian Basin

Midland Health & Medical Center Health System partner with the community and Legislature to build a new dedicated behavioral health hospital

PARTNERS IN IMPROVING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE

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

While 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 or their cities and counties.

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 in addressing the state's many behavioral health care challenges.

The Permian Basin Challenge

The Permian Basin's growing population of more than 700,000 is spread across an area roughly the size of Minnesota. Every one of the Permian Basin's 21 counties is designated as a mental health professional shortage area, with fewer than one psychiatrist for every 10,000 residents. The region's mental health care system had capacity to treat fewer than half of adults in need and only 11 percent of children needing mental health care, according to a 2016 assessment of the region's mental health care availability by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute.

Behavioral health care for all populations is generally lacking, but the unavailability is particularly acute for those awaiting competency restoration to stand trial for criminal offenses.

At least 2,100 individuals across the state are currently waiting for a forensic bed, and waiting lists can be as long as two years. In Ector County alone, more than 300 people are in jail awaiting competency restoration.



The Innovation

To address their region's pressing and increasing behavioral health care needs, the hospital districts in two counties — Midland Health in Midland County and Medical Center Health System in Ector County — partnered to build and co-manage the new Permian Basin Behavioral Health Center (PBBHC), a 225,000-square foot, state-of-the-art, 200-bed behavioral health hospital with support from the Legislature. A partnership of this scale and purpose is unprecedented, but each hospital's leaders understood that fundamentally changing the landscape of behavioral health care in the region meant working together to do more than either hospital could do on its own.

"We knew this would be a massive undertaking, but we also knew our region was in need of significant investments to address its behavioral health needs," said Russell Meyers, Midland Health's former president/CEO and current president of PBBHC's Board. "This all began with just a couple of people in a room and a conversation, but we recognized that we could transform behavioral health care in more ways than we initially imagined."

Soon after the plans for the new facility were drawn up, state legislators, with the leadership of Reps. Tom Craddick and Brooks Landgraf, appropriated \$40 million in 2021 to support construction of what was originally to be a 100-bed facility. The Legislature's enhanced mental health focus brought an additional \$86 million in 2023, along with a mandate to add forensic beds for non-violent offenders to support the competency restoration program.



Private and corporate philanthropy and local governments across the region have contributed an additional \$95 million in support to date. Diamondback Energy, for example, donated the more than 50 acres on which the hospital is being built, almost equidistant from both acute care hospitals in Midland and Odessa. Additional support comes from community foundations and the Permian Strategic Partnership (PSP), a coalition of 30 energy companies investing in initiatives to improve quality of life in the Permian Basin region of West Texas and Southeast New Mexico.

"The enthusiasm and support we've received for this project has been tremendous," said Russell Tippin, president/CEO of Medical Center Health System. "It's crystal clear that everyone understands the importance of addressing our region's behavioral health needs and that this new hospital will have a profound impact on our ability to meet those needs."

About the Hospital Districts

Midland Health is the hospital district for Midland County and has served Midland and the surrounding areas since 1950. The hospital is licensed for 546 beds and includes a wide range of services including oncology, neurosurgery, home health services, and cardiac care at its Heart Institute.



Medical Center Health System is the hospital district for Ector County and has served the county and surrounding Permian Basin communities since 1949. The 402-bed hospital includes a NICU, stroke center, and a walk-in urgent care clinic.



Set to open in the spring of 2026, the Permian Basin Behavioral Health Center will offer a wide range of behavioral health services, including care for children ages six and up through adult and geriatric behavioral health care. The hospital's services will encompass both inpatient and outpatient behavioral health care, spanning the full continuum of mental health diagnostic and treatment capabilities. Additionally, 42 of the hospital's 200 beds will be dedicated to competency restoration.

The hospital will serve as a behavioral health hub for the entire region, accepting transfers of patients in need of complex or acute psychiatric care from the surrounding communities. Testing and diagnostic resources will be utilized in coordination with schools throughout the region, and the hospital will provide education and resources to help families heal and recover together, close to home.

PBBHC at a Glance



200 inpatient beds



\$232 million project 95 percent funded



Serves 21 counties



Expected to open Spring 2026



Full range of behavioral health services for ages 6+



Dedicated forensic beds for competency restoration



Clinical training and education opportunities



Residency, fellowship, and scholarship programs

Permian Basin Behavioral Health Center Services Include:

- Inpatient behavioral health care
- Outpatient care and services
- Crisis center with psychiatric emergency room
- Individual and family counseling
- Adolescent substance abuse programs
- Testing resources
- Clinical training and continuing education programs
- Residency and fellowship programs
- Dedicated forensic beds

Staffing the New Hospital

While construction is the first milestone for the new behavioral health hospital, recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of staff, from psychiatrists and licensed professional counselors to orderlies and dieticians, is the next big step. Once completed, the behavioral health hospital will need approximately 500 FTEs, including psychiatrists, nurse practitioners, behavioral health technicians, social workers, and licensed professional counselors.

PBBHC will be the teaching home of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center's (TTUHSC) Permian Basin Psychiatry Department, along with teaching partnerships with academic institutions throughout the area including University of Texas Permian Basin (UTPB), Midland College, and Odessa College. The new behavioral health hospital will expand these partnerships to help meet its staffing needs. These partnerships include clinical training programs, residencies and fellowships, and scholarship programs.


These partnerships include psychiatric and mental health training for nurses, the expansion of an existing partnership with TTUHSC to more than double the number of psychiatrists on site, and a scholarship program with UTPB to help

master's candidates in counseling psychology, clinical psychology and social work get the clinical training hours they need.

Clinical Training and Education Programs

Midland Health's current nurse training program includes specialty clinical training and a residency component. The program will expand to include a psychiatric nursing track to help boost and develop PBBHC's nurse workforce. The new hospital is already working with local nursing programs to expand and strengthen this psychiatric training program.

One of the biggest staffing needs for the new hospital is behavioral health technicians (BHTs). To fill this need and develop a sustainable pipeline of BHTs, the new hospital has partnered with Midland College to create a new training program for BHTs. The program is supported in part through state funding and will include opportunities for students to earn an associate's degree or two-semester certification. The new curriculum represents a model that allows for additional academic institutions to join the program in the future.



"We're encouraged to see the widespread enthusiasm and support for this center from Texas medical schools and academic institutions. Texas' teaching hospitals are leading the way to create generational investments in the region's behavioral health and create positive impacts beyond the Permian Basin."

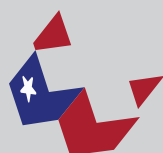


Maureen Milligan, PhD
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Scholarship and Residency Opportunities

UTPB, in partnership with the PSP and the Scharbauer Foundation, is funding a scholarship program for students pursuing master's degrees in psychology, social work, or counseling. The program will help students meet the high number of post-graduate hours required for licensure, removing financial barriers to completion of this process. Additionally, the program will benefit care for the entire region, as participants must work in the Permian Basin for three years following the completion of their program. Students will then have the opportunity to obtain post-graduate pre-licensure hours through a partnership between UTPB and TTUHSC in the mental health fellowship program.

TTUHSC's existing psychiatry residency program will also be expanded to help the center meet its staffing needs. The school will more than double the number of faculty psychiatrists in the program, significantly boosting capacity and availability of behavioral health experts in the region.



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