

# Houston's Assisted Outpatient Program Marks Four Years, Transforming Mental Health Care and Cutting Costs

*Program Achieves Over 42% Successful Completions, Reduces Hospitalizations, and Lowers Emergency Room Visits for Houston Residents with Serious Mental Illness*

HOUSTON, TX, UNITED STATES, November 12, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Houston Assisted

“

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*Jose Vazquez, a program graduate and Houston resident*

Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Program has successfully completed a four-year initiative aimed at improving the lives of individuals with serious mental illness (SMI). Through a collaborative effort involving The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD, the UTHealth Harris County Psychiatric Center (HCPC), an evaluation team from the University of Houston School of Social Work, and Harris County Probate Court 3, the AOT Program helped participants access care, reduce emergency services usage, and stabilize their lives, resulting in substantial cost savings for the community.

“The Houston AOT Program is a testament to the power of

coordinated, compassionate care,” said Wayne Young, CEO of The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD. “Through collaboration and a shared commitment to improving mental health outcomes, we’re able to empower individuals to regain stability and hope in their lives, which benefits not only participants but the entire Houston community.”

The program, which served 175 participants, worked to reduce psychiatric hospitalizations, emergency room visits, homelessness, and interactions with law enforcement by improving treatment engagement and adherence.

Key Accomplishments:

**Improved Mental Health and Stability:** Participants experienced significant reductions in hospital stays and emergency room visits for mental health issues. Program participants had a 214% increase in stable housing while in the program and 55.6% of the participants had zero hospitalizations during the program. Participation in the program was also linked to a 31.2%

increase in medication adherence.

**Cost Savings:** The Houston AOT Program was able to successfully reduce the incidence and duration of psychiatric hospitalization, emergency healthcare service usage, homelessness, incarceration, and other interactions with the criminal justice system by improving sustained treatment engagement, treatment adherence, and functional outcomes. The per-consumer cost of the AOT Program was approximately \$12,732.49 per enrolled consumer, which is currently half the cost of a single emergency department visit and 72-hour psychiatric hospital stay, estimated at approximately \$25,000. Additional cost savings were evidenced through decreased use of emergency versus community-based outpatient healthcare and reduced encounters with law enforcement, including decreases in incarceration.

**Increased Treatment Adherence and Stability:** Medication adherence improved and participants saw an increase in stable housing while in the program. Additionally, employment and educational engagement rose as participants achieved greater stability in their lives.

**Successful Completions:** More than 42% of participants completed the program successfully. Graduates were much less likely to be re-hospitalized compared to those who did not complete the program.

“This program impacted my life by allowing me to mature and make better choices. It helped me move back into reality, so that I can better look out for myself and my family,” said Jose Vazquez, a program graduate and Houston resident. “I haven't gone back to the hospital in a long time now and I continue to feel like I don't need to go back there.”

**Looking Forward:** The Houston AOT Program's success highlights the critical need for continued investment in comprehensive mental health services across Harris County. Building on these achievements, program leaders advocate for expanded multilingual resources, strengthened housing support, and the inclusion of voices with lived experience to shape the future of mental health care in our community. Together, these efforts pave the way for a healthier, more supportive environment for those facing serious mental health challenges.

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**About The Harris Center:**

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD is the state-designated Local Mental Health Authority and Local Intellectual and Developmental Disability Authority for Harris County, serving over 88,000 individuals annually. The Harris Center works to empower individuals with behavioral health needs and intellectual and developmental disabilities to live with dignity as fully integrated members of the community.

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About Harris County Probate Court 3:

The mental health division of Harris County Probate Court 3 under Judge Jason Cox hears cases involving civil mental health commitments and other issues affecting vulnerable populations.

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