

Pathways Recovery Centers COO Calls for Innovation Over Cuts in Oklahoma Mental Health Care

Pathways Recovery Drew LaBoon advocates for technological innovation over budget cuts in Oklahoma's mental health system to improve care access and efficiency.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK, UNITED STATES, May 7, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Oklahoma's Mental Health Needs Innovation, Not Funding Cuts

As Oklahomans, we can no longer ignore this truth: Mental health care delivery and cost need a reckoning in our state. Between 700,000 and 950,000 adult Sooners currently need mental health services, and far too few of them will get it. According to internal data from [Pathways](#) Recovery Centers, about one in three individuals seeking treatment do not qualify for marketplace insurance, and those who turn to state-funded programs face a waitlist of four to six weeks. Tragically, some

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lose their lives while waiting, while others become so discouraged by the delay that they abandon their search for help altogether. This Mental Health Awareness Month, it's time to look beyond the platitudes at what is really happening in our state — and how we can turn this situation around.

Funding cuts from the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (DMHSAS) will further prevent patients from accessing essential care if we continue to operate under current paradigms. If the state instead re-evaluated contracts, care, and operations for modernization and improvement, we would see a more

business-minded approach that values our patient outcomes just as much as budget considerations.



Innovation Over Cuts in Oklahoma Mental Health Care

The two need not be mutually exclusive. Today, with the advent of AI and new technology advancements, there are more tools and opportunities than ever for patient-centered innovation to transform care. Truly innovative organizations have already partnered with cutting-edge technology providers in mental health to improve care access, quality and efficiency. To scale that kind of impact, we need more collaboration between industry-leading care providers and the state to change our current system, rather than the short-sighted elimination of essential programs and reimbursement clawbacks.

At my organization, Pathways, early investment in new technologies has been essential to delivering care in the face of increased financial pressures and growing need in Oklahoma. We use geographic patient monitoring, a crucial service when more than 30% of Oklahomans live in rural areas, where access to mental health and substance use treatment remains a persistent challenge. Relatedly, our partnership with HUML Health brought biometric monitoring into our treatment practices, giving clinicians better tools for timely patient intervention. HUML Health's biometric tracking has been associated with a 30% increase in early relapse detection, a lifesaving statistic for many of our clients.

Our clinicians also use generative AI tools like Eleos to streamline their documentation burden. Pathways Recovery Centers saw a 70% decrease in documentation time within six months of implementation of this technology, and it continues to decrease. As a result, clinicians spend more time providing care while maintaining the required documentation standards. Eleos enables us to deliver on what the government is demanding of our mental health system — be efficient with our resources — while also allowing us to fulfill our mission of providing substance use disorder treatment to as many clients as possible.

Crucially, we see real, quantitative returns from our investments in innovation. More than 50 to 60% of folks in our programs reach one year of sobriety. We've also seen a 30% increase in early detection and timely readmissions. The ability to quickly identify relapse risks and bring someone back into care can mean the difference between recovery and tragedy. Getting individuals safe and back on track, rather than letting them slip through the cracks, is critical to reducing overdose deaths and suicide.

The result? Improved quality of life for our alumni and the communities where they work and live. Compared to national averages, we see a 30% higher rate of employment among Pathways alumni at one year post-treatment. The combination of these tools and access to care changes the trajectory of patients' lives—and the lives of everyone around them.

Mental health organizations like Pathways meet the pressing mental health needs across Oklahoma. Rather than sidelining us and other critical organizations, state leaders should work with us to learn more about the realities of patient needs and the tech that is shifting the tides in care quality and efficiency.

Indubitably, the current budget pressures are very real. But the downstream cost savings associated with both timely mental healthcare and innovative tech adoption are exactly what Oklahoma requires to continue meeting our state's immense need in the face of system-level financial challenges. The fiscal upside of these investments far outweigh the costs, and it is crucial that we encourage — rather than prevent — their utilization here in Oklahoma. Our citizens' lives depend on it.

Drew LaBoon is the Chief Operating Officer for Pathways Recovery Centers and the Founder and President of the Board for Pathways to Innovation, a nonprofit dedicated to enhancing collaboration among substance abuse treatment providers.

Andrew Laboon
Pathways Recovery
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