

# Texas Mental Health Landscape

## The Local Burden of Unmet Mental Health Needs in Texas

The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute partnered with the Texas Conference of Urban Counties to study outcomes of the Texas mental health system. The partnership worked with the Texas Council of Community Centers, the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas and the Texas Association of Counties to survey Texas counties regarding the burden of unmet mental health needs at the local level.

Counties representing more than half of Texas' population provided data on jail related costs, including large and small counties (21 total). Using county level prevalence estimates, the Institute determined the relationship between the number of people with serious mental illness and the cost of housing and treating individuals with mental illness in county jails and then used this algorithm to interpolate the costs incurred by the rest of Texas counties. A subset of these counties (10) also provided information on juvenile justice costs for youth with serious emotional disturbances. Using the same methodology as with the jail costs, we estimated the statewide county juvenile justice costs for youth with serious emotional disturbances.

The Institute separately analyzed the cost of emergency department visits related to mental or substance use based on a Texas Health Care Information Collection annual survey of hospitals. Using average costs for these services from a cross-section of North Texas hospitals, total costs were estimated for hospitals across Texas.

Jail Costs for Individuals with Mental Illness	\$450 million
Juvenile Justice Costs for Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbances	\$230 million
Psychiatric Emergency Department Costs	\$940 million
Alcohol and Substance Abuse Emergency Department Costs	\$445 million

**SMART JUSTICE**

**8x** Individuals with untreated mental health and substance use disorders are *8 times* more likely to be incarcerated, often due to lack of access to appropriate crisis services and ongoing care.

**17%** Of adults entering jails and state prisons have a serious mental health illness.\*

**50%** Of prison and jail inmates in the United States have been diagnosed with a behavioral disorder. \*\*

**34%** Of Texas inmates have a mental health need and most have substance use disorders\*\* \*

\* Council of State Governments Justice Center  
\*\* U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Program  
\*\*\* Texas Department of Criminal Justice

**70%** Of youth in the juvenile justice system suffer from mental health disorders.\*\*\*\*

**27%** Of these youth experience disorders so severe that their ability to function is significantly impaired.\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice

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### Additional Information on the Methodology

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In estimating county jail costs for individuals with serious mental illness, the Institute asked counties to estimate the number of individuals with serious mental illness in county jails using three different methodologies. The most commonly used method was based on mental health related questions from an in processing questionnaire that all county jails are required to utilize. For counties that did not track this data, an alternative method was used based on positive matches for services received from local mental health authorities. The third option was to use the number of individuals receiving psychotropic medication.

In addition to the number of individuals with mental illness in the county jail, the survey also asked for the average number of days served for this group, the average housing cost per day, and the average mental health treatment costs per day. In some cases counties were able to provide all of this data; in others, only some. In cases with missing data, the Institute used the average of values provided by other counties. In order to interpolate estimates for counties not providing data, the Institute determined the relationship between county jail costs and the prevalence of individuals with serious mental illness in each county using multiple regression techniques (allowing a second order polynomial relationship between cost and prevalence). For the jail data set, variations in the prevalence of serious mental illness explained 95% of the variation in jail costs, indicating a strongly predictive model. This same model was then used to project juvenile justice costs based information from the 10 counties (representing a large portion of state population) providing data.

In estimating the cost of mental health (MH) and substance use disorder (SUD) related emergency department (ED) visits, the Institute used the Texas Health Care Information Collection (THCIC) survey of 580 hospitals. For MH ED visits, 88 hospitals provided data (from 42 counties). For SA ED visits, 68 hospitals provided data (from 37 counties). For ED visits as a whole, 406 provided data (from 184 counties). For the hospitals that provided both MH and total ED visits, the Institute estimated the relationship between these variables, using multiple regression and a third order polynomial form. Institute staff then interpolated the number of MH visits for those hospitals reporting total ED visits, but not reporting MH visits. They then performed the same interpolation for SUD visits. This resulted in reported or interpolated MH/SUD ED visits for 406 of 580 hospitals from across the state. Only these 406 hospitals were used to determine the statewide estimate. Since these data recorded visits, not charges, an average cost per visit had to be calculated from a separate study of emergency room visits in North Texas. The Dallas Fort Worth Hospital Council Foundation (DFWHCF) issued a November 2013 White Paper on emergency room visits in North Texas, reporting average costs of \$2,940.87 per MH ED visit and \$3545.12 per SUD visit. Using these cost data, the Institute converted hospital ED visits into costs and then aggregated hospitals by county, resulting in estimates for 184 separate counties. This method likely underestimates the true total of MH and SUD related ED costs across Texas, since it excluded all hospitals that did not report the total number of ED visits (174 out of 580).

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### About Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

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The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute was established to support the implementation of policies and programs to help Texans obtain effective, efficient mental health care when and where they need it. Our vision is for Texas to be the national leader in treating people with mental health needs. The Institute brings together mental health policy and program leaders to identify, evaluate and implement best practices and policies that improve mental health care for all Texans. To learn more, please visit [texasstateofmind.org](https://texasstateofmind.org).

### Contact Meadows Institute

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One important role for the Institute is responding to the information needs of Texas leaders. Legislators, agency leaders, and their staff must often address mental health policy either directly or in relation to other health and human service policy matters. The Institute is a resource for Texas leaders. This Institute is here to assist. If you have questions about behavioral health data or policy, please contact:

Coby Chase | Director of External Affairs  
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### About Texas Conference of Urban Counties

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The Texas Conference of Urban Counties is a non-profit organization created by 38 member counties to save tax dollars by facilitating collaboration. Member counties represent nearly 80% of the population of Texas. Counties collaborate in three areas: a unified voice with State officials regarding State policy; education, research and idea exchanges regarding public policy and management; and shared and collaborative services such as Public Power Pool (electric power purchasing) and TechShare (collaborative information technology projects). All services and activities are pursued for the benefit of the people of Texas. To learn more, please visit [cuc.org](https://cuc.org).

### Contact Urban Counties

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If you have questions or would like more information about the Texas Conference of Urban Counties, please contact:

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