

About Pennsylvania Courts' Behavioral Health Initiative

The Growing Behavioral Health Crisis

Across Pennsylvania—and the nation—communities are facing an escalating behavioral health crisis. The frequency, severity and complexity of these challenges are increasing, placing tremendous strain on individuals, families, and public systems.

Recognizing the courts are on the front lines of this crisis, the Pennsylvania judiciary is mobilizing—forging partnerships and driving innovation to make the courts part of the solution.

Over

1.8 million adults in PA have a mental health condition.



1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.



About 2 in 5 adults in jail or prison have a history of mental illness.



7 in 10 youth in the juvenile justice system have a mental health condition.

What is the Pennsylvania Courts' Office of Behavioral Health?

Created in response to this growing crisis, the Office of Behavioral Health works to improve court and community responses to behavioral health challenges within the judicial system.

The office was created to identify gaps in the system, to address key issues including access to services and support, and pinpoint intersections between at-risk populations and the courts.

Through this office, the courts are focused on improving court responses, supporting continuums of care and enhancing outcomes for individuals and families facing behavioral health challenges in Pennsylvania. In addition to developing training opportunities for judges, the work is being done collaboratively with government partners to create a local roadmap to resources and services statewide.

"If we can provide support to people who become involved in the court system and have a plan in place to assist, we can change and save lives. We just need to be willing to do the work and the courts stand ready."

Pa. Supreme Court Justice Kevin Dougherty

Initiative Timeline:

March 2020

The Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators launched a National Judicial Task Force to examine and enhance state court responses to mental illness.

May 2024

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) officially established the Office of Behavioral Health to enhance judicial leadership, education and stakeholder engagement.

October 2024

Pennsylvania Courts hosted first statewide Behavioral Health Summit, bringing together more than 500 judges, industry leaders, stakeholders and government partners to enhance court responses to the growing behavioral health crisis and develop collaborative solutions for justice-involved individuals in need.

2025

The Office of Behavioral Health plans to conduct regional summits across Pennsylvania to learn about the specific challenges different counties are facing and align their next steps.