



## Hays County's Behavioral Advisory Team Establishes a Strong Foundation for Change

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In December 2022, residents of Hays County came together to hold a Sequential Intercept Model (SIM) mapping workshop for behavioral health, law enforcement, court, and community stakeholders to identify opportunities to support individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders and reduce county costs through increased collaboration and coordination across local behavioral health and justice systems. This workshop was just the beginning for Hays County, as local leaders galvanized to move the work forward. Cities involved included San Marcos, Kyle and Buda.

Post-workshop, the formation of the Behavioral Advisory Team (BAT) in March 2023 has been the singular driving force behind the county's ability to turn their ideas into action. The BAT functions as a singular point of contact for planning, accountability, and resource coordination for behavioral health and justice agencies in Hays County.

Some of the county's successes so far include allocation of dollars for soft costs associated with their #1 goal, which is the creation of a diversion/drop-off center, as well as work toward a behavioral health office that would serve as a single point of contact for those experiencing serious mental illness, or their family members. This Center for Mental Wellness is still in the planning phase, but efforts are underway to ensure all intercepts are fully contemplated, including a new Behavioral Threat Assessment Group that will become operational in November 2023. The local mental health authority, Hill Country, has since hired a forensic director who will evaluate competency restoration and waitlists, and they were able to become the 7<sup>th</sup> in the state to offer multisystemic therapy teams. Embedded mental health clinicians already work alongside law enforcement, as the BAT works toward a strong foundation for change.

### ***What is a SIM mapping?***

The SIM is a conceptual tool developed to help communities understand how people with mental illness (MI) and substance use disorders (SUD) come into contact and move through the criminal justice system.

SIM mapping workshops bring together community leaders and officials from different agencies and systems to identify local gaps and develop new strategies to reduce and prevent justice involvement for people with MI and SUD.

For more information on SIM mapping workshops visit the [Texas Behavioral Health and Justice Technical Assistance Center](#).

The BAT is made up of 16 voting members, who meet monthly and regularly interface with behavioral health and justice stakeholders to focus on the “Hays County Roadmap,” a plan that lays out priorities and action steps for the community. San Marcos Police Chief Stan Standridge and Hays County Court Judge Elaine Brown co-chair the group.

Hays County’s goals evolved from priorities identified at the SIM workshop. Priorities for the county, as identified in the Hays County Roadmap include:

1. Expand crisis options through the development of a diversion center;
2. Develop strategies to address high needs utilizers and pilot a new Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) program;
3. Explore the development of a Behavioral Health Office to coordinate county services, while also focusing on local restoration services for those who are incarcerated;
4. Increase information and data sharing across the Sequential Intercept Model;
5. Enhance 911 and law enforcement response to behavioral health crises.

Chief Standridge and Judge Brown acknowledge that this work is the product of the collective efforts related to the BAT. Hays County’s strong BAT and the work the community has accomplished in a short period of time since the SIM mapping workshop represents what is possible when collaboration is prioritized by all levels within the community.



This image depicts the foundational work of Hays County’s SIM mapping and BAT formation as a conduit to achieving the goals outlined by the community’s leaders. Note: MST implementation is the only program listed that is not related to the BAT’s work but is included here as an important behavioral health service for youth and families that was developed in 2023.

## Other Texas Counties with a BAT or Behavioral Health Leadership Team (BHLT):

- [The Dallas County BHLT](#) was developed in 2011 and is made up of five advocates, 13 county/city organizations, 6 residential facilities, 16 outpatient providers and three payers/ funders. The leadership team also has developed sub-committees to target specific community needs including an Adult Clinical Operations Team, a Behavioral Health Steering Committee, and a Crisis Services Project.
- [Texoma BHLT](#) serves as the community's hub for mental health and wellness. The team is comprised of Behavioral Health Hospitals; city, county, and state representatives; consumers; patients, and families; school districts; community college; private liberal arts college; Emergency Departments; funders; judicial and law enforcement; managed care/insurance; mental health service providers (including the area's local mental health authority); the region's veterans hospital located in the service area, and workforce leaders.
- [Smith County's BHLT](#) exists to provide guidance and linkage among stakeholders to build broad access to timely and appropriate behavioral health care services in Smith County. The BHLT is led by a steering committee and membership is open to all interested individuals and organizations representing education, government, community leadership, behavioral health providers, primary care providers, consumers, social services, first responders, hospitals and veterans
- The **Abilene and Taylor County BAT** was established in 2018 by unanimous agreement of participants at an organizational meeting. The City of Abilene and Taylor County BAT is empowered to specifically function as a single point of advisory, accountability, planning, and resource coordination for all City of Abilene and Taylor County behavioral health services. The BAT developed a charter to guide the actions of the advisory team and establish accountability across advisory team members to ensure the success of the BAT.

## Other Resources

- The National Institute of Corrections has resources on [Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils \(CJCCs\)](#) and Criminal Justice Coordinating Committees. Like BATs and BHLTs, CJCCs use data and structured planning to address issues in the justice system, including issues related to mental health and substance use. CJCC resources can support the development and implementation of BATs and BHLTs