

Tarrant County Mental Health Jail Diversion Center

Communities across the state are challenged by high volumes of people experiencing behavioral health crises with nowhere to go. This has resulted in the increased utilization of criminal justice and emergency healthcare settings as placement options for individuals in crisis. The development of diversion centers is an emerging community-based strategy to engage and better serve this population while reducing the pressure put on both community criminal justice and emergency health care settings.



Tarrant County has adapted the diversion center model to meet the communities most pressing needs through the development of the Tarrant County Mental Health Jail Diversion Center (MHJDC). The need for this facility was backed by data from 2020 indicating that **60.4%** of criminal trespassing cases in Tarrant County involved individuals who had previously received services from My Health My Resources of Tarrant County (MHMR Tarrant). MHMR Tarrant developed this center to provide a recovery-oriented, short-stay alternative to incarceration for non-violent, justice-involved persons with mental health needs. This facility provides an alternative for law enforcement to address the needs of people experiencing a mental health crisis while reducing the arrests of these individuals on non-violent misdemeanor charges.

The MHJDC offers immediate mental health and primary healthcare interventions targeted to the unique needs of clients. Some of the on-site services offered include assessments, integrated treatment and care plans, on-site psychiatric care, on site primary care, medication management, psychosocial programming, substance use disorder interventions, rehabilitation services, peer support and extensive discharge planning.

"It is a win for everybody, and you can't always say that about criminal justice changes,"¹ Sharen Wilson, Tarrant County Criminal District Attorney, said in a 2021 Community Impact article.

¹ <https://communityimpact.com/dallas-fort-worth/grapevine-colleyville-southlake/public-safety/2021/09/12/officials-call-proposed-mental-health-jail-diversion-center-in-tarrant-county-a-win-for-everybody/>.

Preliminary Data and Outcomes

- From January 2022 through August 2022 **116 people** were admitted to the MHJDC, **98%** of which were unhoused.
- Total number of **community-based referrals** made:
 - Housing Services: 40;
 - Substance Abuse Services- 21;
 - Follow-up MH Care- 82;
 - Follow-up Medical Care- 85;
- **85 people** were enrolled in the MHJDC Transition Program (aftercare) between January 2022 through August 2022.

Other Communities with Diversion Centers

- **Judge Ed Emmett Mental Health Diversion Center** is a deflection program operated by The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD. The program opened in September 2018 to reduce the number of people charged with misdemeanor offenses who have a serious mental health diagnosis from being booked into jail. From September 2018 through February 2020, 1,172 people were served through the diversion center with just over 75% of those individuals being diagnosed with a serious mental illness. The program has had success in deflecting over 1,500 people from jail and the participants in the program have had an overall reduction in new jail stays by 50% after entering the Diversion Center program for the first time.²

Additionally, Harris County has developed a [Diversion-Implementation Guide](#) that provides practical guidance from H for planning a crisis diversion center including, laid out in four phases: (1) information gathering; (2) planning; (3) implementation and monitoring; (4) evaluation and sustainability.³

Relevant Resources

- [A Community Guide for Development of a Crisis Diversion Facility](#), by Health Management Associates (HMA)
- [Blueprint for Success: The Bexar County Model, How to Set Up a Jail Diversion Program in Your Community](#), The National Association of Counties
- [Roadmap to the Ideal Crisis System](#), National Council for Behavioral Health

² Starting-MH<https://justicesystempartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Diversion-Implementation-Guide-Final-Reduced.pdf>-Court-Harris-County-Diversion-Center-Final-Report-10092020.pdf (iemvirtual.com).

³ <https://justicesystempartners.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Diversion-Implementation-Guide-Final-Reduced.pdf>.