

MENTAL HEALTH

Support for improved delivery of mental health services and mental illness treatment

The League of Women Voters of Oklahoma (LWVOK) believes that provision of mental health services in Oklahoma should be improved in the following ways:

- The state should undertake a basic mental health needs assessment of children, adults, elderly, homeless, and penal institution populations to serve as the basis for coordinated state and local planning to determine need for services.
- The assessment should include input from citizens as well as all providers and funding sources.
- The assessment should occur each decade or after any major revision in the structure of mental illness services such as the closing of Eastern State Hospital.

The state should focus on all aspects of identification and prevention of emotional problems, mental illness, and substance abuse. State funding should be provided for intervention and prevention programs in schools and child-care programs.

The state should increase funding for child mental health services and correct systemic payment issues which prevent any access to that care.

The state should monitor the effectiveness of mental health programs to ensure accountability and to translate these findings into better allocation of available funds.

The LWVOK believes that the delivery of services for mental illness and substance abuse in Oklahoma can be more effective. Therefore, the LWVOK recommends that the state of Oklahoma and the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (DMHSA) undertake the following:

- developing a strategic state plan for treatment of illness based on epidemiological data that addresses all populations,
- funding for training personnel for delivery of services with placement based on the needs of a community,
- improving access to mental illness services,
- stopping the diversion of mentally ill children and adults into the corrections system, and
- increasing funding to the Oklahoma DMHSA especially to outpatient centers for mental illness and substance abuse.

Consensus approved 2002

BACKGROUND

Delegates to the 2001 LWVOK Convention adopted the study “Mental Illness and Delivery of Care in Oklahoma.”

The motion was in the form of a vote for concurrence to adopt a state position on mental illness and treatment in Oklahoma based on the position that League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa (LWVMT) had reached after an 18-month study on the topic.

The concurrence was passed and there was discussion by local league delegates on how the concurrence process could be extended to the local level. It was determined that each league would study the issue within its own community, and concur or revise the LWVMT position relative to its local circumstances. The LWVOK Board would then accept or reject the concurrence or revisions from the local leagues.

The original timetable for concurrence by the local leagues was to be prior to the 2002 Oklahoma legislative session so bills and lobbying on mental health issues could be developed. In the summer of 2001, the LWVMT mailed reference materials to each local League so it could examine the issue in relation to its own community.

Individual Leagues then created publicity and held a variety of meetings with community professionals, consumers of services, and families concerned with treatment services for various age groups. Because this process was lengthy and differed for each League, results were not available until March 2002. The LWVMT collected the responses from the local Leagues and members at large who were able to participate. The LWVMT Mental Health Study chair integrated all suggested revisions and additions to their position into one document. These results were reviewed and then accepted by the LWVOK Board at the March 2002 meeting allowing league members to advocate for mental health/illness issues during the remainder of the legislative session. The LWVOK is one of a few non-single-issue Oklahoma organizations to take a position on this issue.

In 2019, the LWVOK chose Health Care in Oklahoma as the subject of a two-year study. As the research and writing team began to limit this very broad topic, it was decided that the study should focus on reproductive health and behavioral health (including mental illness). The study materials will include data that reveal how Oklahoma rates on services to the mentally ill as well as measures that might be taken to improve the state’s performance in this area.

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