



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 8th Annual Judicial Summit on Mental Health, convened by the Texas Judicial Commission on Mental Health in October 2025, brought together members of the judiciary, behavioral health and medical professionals, attorneys, law enforcement leaders, and policymakers from across Texas to advance coordinated responses for individuals with mental illness, intellectual and developmental disabilities, or substance use disorders who encounter the justice system.

Participants overwhelmingly praised the event's organization, relevance, and impact, with more than ninety percent rating it as excellent or very good. The discussions and sessions throughout the Summit reflected a shared commitment to building a more collaborative, effective, and data-driven system of care. Across plenary and breakout sessions, several unifying lessons emerged.

First, participants reaffirmed that collaboration remains the cornerstone of lasting reform. Meaningful progress depends on relationships of trust among courts, behavioral health providers, and community partners who share responsibility for improving outcomes. Speakers emphasized that reform efforts must also humanize those at the center of crisis encounters, ensuring that compassion and trauma-informed practices guide every point of system contact.

Leaders further called for a continued focus on improving the competency restoration process, including community-based restoration and continuity of care after release, and on using data to drive measurable results that inform future investments. Courts and agencies were encouraged to set realistic goals and measure success incrementally, focusing on sustainable progress rather than perfection.

The Summit also highlighted the need to build recovery-oriented systems that empower individuals through community support, to elevate the voices of people with lived experience and their families, and to prioritize early intervention for youth to prevent entry into the justice system as a pathway to care. Participants shared examples of innovation despite limited resources, demonstrating that local leaders can re-engineer existing assets to fill service gaps while maintaining fidelity to public safety and recovery principles.

Finally, throughout the Summit, a recurring message of hope, courage, and shared responsibility emerged. Speakers underscored that leadership in this field requires not only policy coordination but also the belief that mental illness is treatable and that recovery is possible for every individual.

Through the vision and guidance of the Supreme Court of Texas and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, the 2025 Summit reaffirmed Texas's national leadership in judicially inspired systems change. By convening diverse partners, facilitating dialogue, and inspiring action, the Commission continues to strengthen cross-system collaboration, advance innovative solutions, and promote a justice system that responds to mental illness with treatment, dignity, and hope.



## TOP TEN LEARNING POINTS

### 1. Collaboration is the Cornerstone of Change

Every successful reform begins with collaboration. From judges on the bench to behavioral health providers, true progress requires cross-disciplinary trust, consistent communication, and a shared vision.

- “Collaboration—in everything—is the key to anything working. Whenever you have two people who want to sit down and address the problem, you can change the system. ‘Let’s call JCMH and see if they have some resources they can give us.’ Collaboration is key.” — *Lee Pierson, J.D., Dallas County DA’s Office*
- “These difficult cases are not one-in-a-million cases. Everyone has these hard cases in their jurisdiction, which tells us that we need to work across agencies collaboratively to find solutions for everyone.” — *Matt Smith, M.A., L.P.C.-S., Texas Juvenile Justice Department*
- “Let’s push against the walls of our silos and collaborate.” — *Hon. Oscar Kazen, Probate Court No. 1, Bexar County*

### 2. Humanize People at the Center of Crisis Encounters

Crisis response improves when compassion meets data. Integrating trauma science into law enforcement training fosters safer, more empathetic interventions for people in distress.

- “Law enforcement, when we are in a moment of crisis, please judge us as *a person* in dire need of help.” — *Tres Jackson, Autism Lived Experience Expert & Autism Ambassador*
- “Law enforcement should learn about trauma because being trauma-informed improves criminal justice system responses.” — *Becky Haas, Consultant*

### 3. Improve the Competency Restoration System

Texas leaders emphasized timely evaluation, continuity of care, and shifting restoration closer to the community rather than defaulting to state hospitals.

- “In the past two years we’ve only sent two people to the state hospital after they started our program.” — *Jonathan Lemuel, Bluebonnet Trails Community Services, discussing the successes of the new JBCR program in Williamson County*
- “State hospitals are treatment facilities, not long-term solutions.” — *Jennie Simpson, Ph.D., Texas Health and Human Services Commission*

#### **4. Use Data to Drive Results**

Data is not optional—it's essential. Tracking high utilizers, outcomes, and process efficiency ensures accountability and smarter allocation of scarce resources.

- "Refine your processes and strategies based on your data. We never stop looking at the data."  
— *Domingo Corona, M.A., Arizona Superior Court in Pima County*

#### **5. Set Realistic Goals and Measure Success**

Courts must define achievable outcomes. Incremental progress, not perfection, keeps programs sustainable and fosters long-term recovery and system improvements.

- "Four steps to success are to operationalize, visualize, plan, and assess. ... The power of stopping and planning is incredible; to get a common understanding of a problem is critical." — *Maj. Brent A. Carr Jr., United States Army, Fort Leavenworth, KS*
- "What you have to start with is realistic goals." — *Hon. Raquel 'Rocky' Jones, 203rd Judicial District Court, Dallas County*

#### **6. Build Recovery-Oriented Systems**

Sustainable recovery depends on community networks, personal empowerment, and differentiated responses to mental health, IDD, and substance use—not one-size-fits-all treatment models.

- "Recovery capital is the breadth and depth of internal and external resources..." — *Hon. Devon Anderson, Justice Forward*
- "Recovery is not linear; when our clients are not doing well, they reach out to us and their attorney, and we plan the best next step toward success." — *Diana Hernandez, Capital Area Private Defender Service*

#### **7. Elevate Lived Experience and Family Partnership**

Peers and families are catalysts for trust and recovery. Systems benefit when lived experience is valued equally alongside clinical and legal expertise.

- "The way we have always done things has continued to not work. Peers bring something that no one else can bring. It is time for us to look into what peer support can do when put on level ground with every other role in criminal justice intervention." — *David Johnson, The HEAL US Project*
- "Family shaming must stop." — *Jerri Clark, Treatment Advocacy Center*

## **8. Prioritize Early Intervention for Youth**

Texas must close service gaps that force young people into justice or child-welfare pipelines just to access care. Prevention is the most effective type of reform.

- “Kids get long-term residential treatment by going through TJJD or DFPS—we need them to get care without going through these systems.” — *Matt Smith, M.A., L.P.C.-S., Texas Juvenile Justice Department*
- “Our child welfare system is designed to protect children and to keep them in place, but we have become a place that children have come to access the behavioral health system.” — *Luanne Southern, M.S.W., Texas Department of Family and Protective Services*

## **9. Innovate Despite Scarcity**

Resource limitations can spark ingenuity. Local courts and counties can re-engineer existing assets and partnerships to fill service gaps instead of waiting for funding or infrastructure.

- “We decided that we weren’t going to let the fact that we didn’t have any treatment beds stop us.” — *Hon. Oscar Kazen, Probate Court No. 1, Bexar County*
- “Compelled medication is really expensive, but if you are having to wait 400 or 500 days in jail to get to the state hospital – your county is spending that money already, just in a different way.” — *Jonathan Lemuel, Bluebonnet Trails Community Services*

## **10. Lead with Hope, Courage, and Shared Responsibility**

Change begins with tone and intention. When leaders express belief in recovery, systems mirror that hope, transforming compliance into collaboration.

- “If your team, if your judge, can engage and show willingness to help rather than punish, the population will engage.” — *Hon. Oscar Kazen, Probate Court No. 1, Bexar County*
- “We have to do more, and we have to remember always and forever that these illnesses are treatable. The answer to a treatable illness is treatment.” — *Jerri Clark, Treatment Advocacy Center*
- “Everyone in the team puts the client first and that’s the first step to meaningful progress. We are really lucky to go slow with clients to get to know them and to be patient. Recovery is not a linear process, but we can rely on the relationship and the trust we have built.” — *Katheleen Tiernan, Capital Area Private Defender Service*