



Creating A Healthier Future for Oklahoma's Women

As an expert in the health care field since 1999, I have seen firsthand how crucial preventive care, high-quality prenatal care, mental health care, and addressing social determinants of health are for a woman's ability to optimize her health.

From breast cancer screenings to yearly well-woman visits, preventive care allows for early detection and intervention, and it's critical that all Oklahoma women have access to the care they need to stay healthy. Unfortunately, Oklahoma ranks [45th in the US for women's health and well-being](#), which is why it's more important than ever for health care leaders, providers, and advocates to work together to break down barriers to care and prioritize women's health. Luckily, these efforts are already underway.

The reality is that in communities across the state, disparities in health care access and outcomes exist, especially among women of color and those in under-resourced communities, with maternal morbidity in Oklahoma [disproportionately impacting American Indian/Alaska Native women](#). To address these outcomes, there are benefits available with the state's new managed care system that can help, including assistance with paying for diapers, rewards for taking healthy steps during and after pregnancy, financial support for families participating in activities and after-school programs, and transportation for grocery shopping, job interviews, or community health and social services.

Alongside maternal health, it is equally important to address the stigma surrounding women's mental health that may prevent some women from seeking help and receiving adequate care. [In the US, more than one in five women experience a mental health condition](#), yet societal norms may discourage them from openly discussing their struggles or seeking professional support. This stigma must be addressed head-on to ensure that women feel empowered to prioritize their mental wellbeing and seek the assistance they need without fear of judgment or shame. In Oklahoma, those receiving care through the state's managed care program can access a variety of mental health resources including one-on-one support for loneliness, depression, or anxiety, support for substance use disorder, mental health coaching, and more.

Many studies show that creating pathways to career opportunities in communities can help people focus on their health. With that in mind, we recently partnered with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services and Work Ready Oklahoma to [open two new Workforce Innovation Talent Centers \(WITCs\) in Oklahoma City](#). The centers will provide essential workforce training and development opportunities, focusing not only on skill-building but also on addressing health-related social needs such as income limitations, educational barriers, and geographic inequities for the community at large. Our goal is to bridge these gaps and ensure that all Oklahomans can achieve their best possible physical and mental health.



As our state continues efforts to improve health outcomes for all Oklahomans, we must identify health disparities and barriers specific to women's health in order for women to receive comprehensive care tailored to their individual and unique needs. Let's work together to promote a culture of wellness that values and supports the wellbeing of all women, regardless of their socioeconomic status, to ensure that Oklahomans receive the care and support they need to thrive.

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