

The Olmstead Commission’s goal is to move North Dakota towards greater integration and inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT

Statewide Independent Living Council

May 7th and 8th

Money Follows the Person External Partners Meeting

May 20th at 1pm

Mental Health America ND

Bloomin Light Out of the Darkness Gala

May 21st at 5:30pm

Cross Disability Advisory Council Meeting

May 28th at 1pm

NEXT

OLMSTEAD MEETING:

Wednesday, May 13th
1-3pm in the Fort Totten
Room at the Capitol

Discussion Topics:
Rural Health
Transformation Program
and Goal #4- Housing

Join meeting [here](#).

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH



May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a time to reflect on the importance of mental well-being and the systems that support it. Here in North Dakota, there is meaningful progress to recognize. The South Central Judicial District is preparing to launch the state’s first Mental Health Court, with proceedings expected to begin in Mandan in October 2026.

The Olmstead Commission’s own Judge Bobbi Weiler, provides an overview of the new mental health court, explaining how the program is designed to better serve individuals navigating mental health challenges within the justice system.



South Central Mental Health Court

Mental health courts are specialized court programs designed to address the high number of individuals with mental illness involved in the criminal justice system—often a cycle that leads to homelessness, addiction, and continued criminal behavior. Rather than relying solely on traditional punishment, these courts emphasize treatment, supervision, and support to address the root causes of criminal behavior.

The first Mental Health Court was established in 1997, and more than 300 mental health courts currently operate nationwide. The mission of the South Central Mental Health Court is to enhance public safety while improving outcomes for participants, their families, and the community by promoting long-term stability and accountability through structured treatment and judicial oversight.

The need for this type of intervention continues to grow. In 2020, courts in Burleigh and Morton Counties ordered 52 mental health evaluations in criminal cases. By 2024, that number had increased to 115—more than doubling in four years. This rapid increase places significant strain on the courts, correctional facilities, the North Dakota State Hospital, and community supervision resources. Research indicates that mental health courts can reduce recidivism rates by approximately 50 percent and significantly decrease the likelihood of future incarceration.

In practical terms, that means fewer individuals cycling through jails and prisons, reduced costs to taxpayers, and safer, more stable communities. The concept for this program was developed during my time as a public defense attorney, where a substantial portion of my clients struggled with both mental health and substance use disorders. It became clear that addressing substance use alone was ineffective; for many individuals, substance use was a way to cope with untreated mental health conditions. In practical terms, we cannot meaningfully address addiction without first addressing underlying mental health issues. What began as an idea grew into a sustained effort to build a more effective response.

Developing this program has required extensive coordination among agencies and community partners. Work has focused on streamlining the evaluation process through collaboration with the North Dakota State Hospital, West Central Human Services, and local detention facilities to ensure individuals are assessed more quickly. Pretrial services have been utilized to assist participants in securing benefits such as Medicaid. Partnerships have also been established to provide housing, transportation, and access to mental health and substance use treatment. Two case managers, funded through the Free Through Recovery Program, will provide ongoing support, including medication management and in-person supervision.

- South Central Judge Bobbi Weiler

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