

Dear AOT Program Participant,

The court has **ordered your participation** in the **Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Program** with Hays County. The purpose of this program is to give you the tools you need so you are **better prepared** to live safely in the community. This program has helped many people **spend less time in the hospital or jail**.

Your participation in this program is part of your **court-ordered commitment** to Hays County based on clear and convincing evidence you have a mental illness that could benefit from this level of care.

The current **term of your commitment** expires on _____.

Your treatment team at Hays County and Hill Country Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (MHDD) Centers will ensure that you have **access to mental health services** you need, including assigning you a case manager and a counselor/treatment provider. You and your treatment team will develop your **treatment plan** based on your goals. If you have other service needs, your case manager will also help you secure those services.

Hill Country MHDD will oversee your progress in the program and provide regular updates to the court. By taking an active role in your treatment, including **taking your medication as prescribed** and **meeting regularly with your case manager**, you can help reduce the amount of time you must remain in the program. Ultimately, however, the court will determine the length of time you are in the program based on the reports from your treatment team.

If you have any questions about the program, please do not hesitate to ask your Case Manager/Care Coordinator. Their contact information is included in the Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program Participant Handbook enclosed with this letter.

Sincerely,

Judge Elaine Brown

HAYS COUNTY



Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program

Participant Handbook

Welcome

Welcome to the Hays County Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Program! This handbook is designed to answer questions and give information about the AOT Program.

Overview

The Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Program is a court-ordered civil commitment of 90 days (3 months) and can be renewed every 90 days for up to 12 months or longer. AOT is designed to assist individuals with their unique needs and mental health, intellectual/developmental disability, and substance use disorders.

AOT promotes wellness, stability, and achievement of goals by providing a structured link and collaboration between the participant, their family, courts, treatment providers, and social support services.

Mission

The mission of the Assisted Outpatient Treatment program is to promote the recovery of adults in the community experiencing severe mental health challenges and provide access to treatment to improve adherence to treatment, reduce involvement in the criminal justice system, and decrease the need of inpatient treatment. AOT is the practice of providing community-based mental health treatment under civil court commitment for adults with mental illness struggling with treatment adherence and/or cycles through repeat hospitalizations and criminal law.

Purpose

The purpose of the AOT program is to provide participants with additional support to access outpatient mental health treatment as an alternative to inpatient psychiatric treatment or incarceration. AOT links the participant to treatment, social support services, and the civil court system to enhance their quality of life and effectively utilize community resources.

Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Program Team

Judge Elaine Brown – County Court at Law #3

Jennifer Putman – AOT Program Administrator

Lauren Dana – AOT Case Manager

Jenna Sumners – AOT Team Lead/Clinician,
Hill Country MHDD

Jane Ramirez –
Hill Country Care Coordinator

Contact Information

County Court at Law Office

Phone: (512) 393-7625

Address: 712 South Stagecoach Trail, Suite 2292

San Marcos, TX 78666

Jennifer Putman: Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program Administrator

Phone: (512) 757-9621(text/call)

Email: jennifer.putman@hayscountytexas.gov

Lauren Dana: AOT Case Manager

Phone:

Email: lauren.dana@hayscountytexas.gov

Jenna Sumners

(830) 955-2760

Hill Country MHDD Crisis Line

877-466-0660

National Suicide Hotline

988

Program Goals

- Early identification of individuals facing incarceration, in- or outpatient facilities, receiving medical or mental health care, in the community, and all other related intercept points where individuals may be identified by a referring individual.
- Identify and coordinate access to appropriate treatment, transportation, housing, and support services for individuals facing difficulty with mental health, substance use, and intellectual disorders.
- Ensure that clinically appropriate services are provided to individuals experiencing continued mental health challenges and effectively evaluate these programs using outcome measurements to gauge the quality and success of these programs.
- Collaborate and establish partnerships with other county and community agencies that will expand the availability of services and resources for participants.
- Improve treatment compliance of the AOT Program participants through judicial monitoring, intensive case management, and family/friend support.

Eligibility Criteria

- Hays County Resident (case by case basis if outside county)
- 18 years of age or older
- Diagnosed with a Severe Mental Illness, including but not limited to: Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Substance use disorders and some intellectual and developmental disabilities can be considered.
- No present criminal charge. AOT may be an option for those found incompetent and/or charges are dismissed or inactive.
- At risk living in the community independently without treatment for mental illness
- Has experienced repeated hospitalizations and/or incarcerations or criminal justice involvement within the past two years
- Unable to participate in treatment and coordinate care independently without supervision
- No substantial history of violent offenses
- Clinical condition(s) makes rational decision making difficult

The AOT Program accepts referrals from all sources in the community: judges, attorneys, jail, hospital or mental health professionals, law enforcement, and family or friends. Once the referral is received and evaluated, the proposed participant and/or referring individual will be contacted to schedule a screening appointment or gather further information with a member of the AOT team.

Screening

AOT Screenings are preferably conducted in person at a previously designated location by a member of the AOT team. The requirements and expectations of the AOT Program are explained, and the eligibility criteria and the proposed participant's mental health history will be discussed. If the proposed participant is found to be in need mental health and/or substance abuse treatment and assistance in complying with medications, the application process will continue.

During this evaluation, clinical staff will assess and determine the appropriate diagnosis and treatment recommended. This will be utilized to guide treatment throughout the program. Upon receiving the intake assessment, the case will be staffed with the team for placement into the AOT program.

Medical records or history will be requested or obtained as it is available. The proposed participant may be asked to sign a Release of Information if they are informed and willing to release their records from a particular provider or location.

Confidentiality

The AOT program follows federal privacy laws (HIPAA and CFR 42) regarding protected health information. AOT may request copies of mental health, substance abuse and physical health records to determine eligibility. The information collected and shared may include participants' evaluations and assessments with diagnosis, treatment plan, treatment attendance, treatment adherence, progress, and prognosis which are for the purposes of determining program eligibility and providing regular status reports to the Judge and AOT team, as well as recommendations for treatment and incentives.

Initial AOT hearings are open to the public. Some participant information may be discussed in open court, but the AOT team makes every effort to avoid disclosure by having court observers sign a confidentiality/non-disclosure statement when possible. All protected health information is kept electronically by AOT staff and is not part of the court file which is open to examination by members of the public. If there is a question about how confidentiality applies in AOT, please contact AOT staff.

Assisted Outpatient Treatment Team

The Assisted Outpatient Treatment Judge makes all decisions regarding participation in the AOT program with support and recommendations from the AOT team. All team members work collaboratively to monitor and support a participant's adherence to the treatment plan and civil court commitment. All team members attend weekly or bi-monthly meetings and AOT hearings to provide input and recommendations to the court.

The AOT team consists of the following members:

- **Judge** – presides at team staff meetings and AOT hearings. The primary responsibility is to encourage and support participants' progress and achievements by providing incentives and participants' adherence to treatment by using clinical responses based on recommendations from the AOT team.
- **Program Administrator** – prescreens referrals for eligibility. Is responsible for overall administrative coordination, management and supervision of MHC functions and processes. Maintains the docket and facilitates staff meetings. Facilitates collaborative partnerships with treatment providers and maintains data collection and clinical documentation.
- **District Attorney** – files application for civil commitment to AOT. Provides input, pertinent case-specific information and recommendations as he/she deems appropriate or as requested by the team. The District Attorney continues in that capacity until the participant successfully graduates or is unsuccessfully discharged from AOT.
- **AOT Case Manager**- screens potential participants to determine eligibility for the AOT Program. They collaborate with and coordinate services with treatment providers, reports on participants' compliance and progress, and make recommendations to the AOT Administrator. Gathers and distributes weekly progress reports to all AOT team members. The AOT Case Manager is responsible for providing information and recommendations to the Judge relating to issues of accountability and treatment.
- **Treatment Providers** – The local mental health authority (LMHA) or contracted mental health providers. Participants may also have private mental health treatment providers, but the provider must agree to update the AOT team as needed. The providers are responsible for coordinating mental health and/or substance abuse assessments. They provide outpatient services including but not limited to medication management, case management, individual and group sessions, counseling, and rehabilitative services. They report on treatment plan goals, symptoms, medications, appointment compliance, and provide recommendations for incentives. They submit progress reports to AOT staff.
- **Attorney Ad Litem** – Court-appointed representative who advocates for the best interests of the individual involved. They serve as a neutral party to ensure the person's rights are

protected throughout the legal process. The ad litem also explains the AOT process in clear terms, including what is required of the individual under the court order, helping them understand their responsibilities and the support available to them.

Program Participation

General Terms of Participation:

The length of participation for Assisted Outpatient Treatment varies depending on treatment goals and progress. Most participants will participate under a Temporary AOT program for 90 days that can be renewed each 90 days for up to 12 months. AOT can be pursued beyond a year if the participant is determined by providers to still need and is receiving benefit from the program. At each transition in AOT renewal, the participant, their attorney, and the AOT team can evaluate the progress and treatment being received and revise any plans moving forward.

Additionally, an Extended AOT commitment is an option with additional prerequisites, and this commitment lasts 12 months without the need for renewal.

Successful Program Completion Includes:

- Stabilized mental health condition with medication compliance
- Successful completion of mental health and substance abuse treatment plan goals
- Compliance with court orders and other program requirements

Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program requirements will be specified in the Participant Agreement and individualized treatment plan.

Discharged/Disqualified

Reasons that a participant may be disqualified or discharged from the AOT program:

- Has reached maximum benefit of the program
- No community-based treatment is likely to restore a person to stability
- Exhibits serious physical harm to self or others which requires long-term hospitalization
- Refuses to comply with treatment and program requirements
- Treatment placement cannot be found
- A written request for a modification or dismissal hearing is submitted to the Judge and resulting hearing results in dismissal
- Violence or threat of violence directed at AOT team members or other participants in the program

Treatment Provider Responsibilities

The AOT team will assist you in developing an individualized treatment and recovery plan that identifies goals that are important to you in your life and will help you to reach them. If you ever feel that your care team is not meeting your needs, let a member of your AOT team and/or your attorney know so that we can address your concerns.

Your AOT team will:

1. Work with you to help you navigate the services and supports that will lead to successful outcomes.
2. Listen to you and make changes to your treatment plan when you feel something is not working for you.
3. Be available to you when you need them and walk beside you throughout the AOT process.

Court Appearances

AOT docket will be held every other week usually on **Wednesday** at 2:00 PM. Frequency of court appearances is determined by the progress being made in treatment and is at the discretion of the Judge. Participants may be asked to appear for hearing earlier than scheduled if not in compliance with treatment goals or for other concerns.

Prior to docket being called, the Judge and the AOT team meet to staff the participants' attendance, compliance with treatment and medications, and their overall progress and status. During the court docket, the Judge will get a report from each team member. The Judge will discuss with the participant their progress and any issues the participant or the team may need to address.

Failure to appear for court will not result in criminal repercussions or fines. However, continued lack of adherence to treatment and/or court appearances may result in the requirement of more frequent court status appearances, an order for an AOT modification hearing, or potential orders for temporary detention with assessment or inpatient psychiatric admission.

Court Etiquette

All participants are required to follow the rules of the courtroom:

- Food, drinks, chewing gum are not allowed in the courtroom
- Cell phones need to be off or silenced
- Out of respect for the court and the other participants, please do not talk in court unless directed to do so by the MHC team members, Judge, or Attorney
- Address the Judge as "Judge" or "Your Honor"
- When responding to the Judge or any MHC team member, reply with respect using appropriate language and tone of voice
- Wear clean, appropriate, and properly fitted clothes
- If requested to stay after court or to come before court to meet with a court team member, make sure to do so

Clinical Responses

During a 90-day Temporary AOT order, changes cannot be made by the court to the treatment plan, However the Judge may order the following treatment recommendations to address non-compliance with mental health needs at a modification hearing, upon an AOT renewal order, or a court ordered emergency detention:

- Intensive outpatient substance abuse treatment
- Detox
- Residential treatment
- Supportive residential treatment or sober living house
- Authorization for disclosure to be signed for doctor-to-doctor consultation
- Mandatory AA/NA/CA or Recovery meetings
- Increase in medication monitoring
- Increase in case management visits
- Individual Counseling
- Mandatory group meetings – anger or stress management, parenting classes, MRT
- Medical follow-up

Graduation

Upon successful completion of the AOT commitments, treatment requirements and satisfactory completion of program requirements, the participant will graduate from the AOT Program.

Graduation from the AOT Program is a very important achievement. Participants' family and friends are invited to join the participant as the AOT Court Judge and team applauds their success in completing the program and achieving their goal of establishing a healthier life using positive coping skills. Commencement ceremonies are held each year to recognize all graduates in a formal ceremony among family, peers and court staff.

Exhibits (on following pages)

A – AOT Treatment Team and Requirements

B – Release of Information

C – Participation Agreement

Welcome to the Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Program

Your Treatment Team may include:

- You and your family/support system (if you wish)
- Care Coordinator: **Jane Ramirez**
- Counselors/Treatment providers: **Jenna Sumners (830) 955-2760**
- Psychiatrist:
- Judge Elaine Brown
- AOT Program Administrator: **Jennifer Putman (512) 757-9621**
- AOT Case Manager: **Lauren Dana**
- Other Service Provider(s):

Program Requirements

While in the AOT Program, you will be asked to be a full and active partner in the program. The AOT team encourages you to:

- Help develop your treatment plan and treatment goals.
- Follow your treatment plan.
- Progress through the phases of the program.
- Participate in regularly scheduled court appearances and give the judge a verbal update of your progress and compliance with your treatment plan.
- Take all prescribed medications and update the treatment team with any issues or side effects.
- Attend all court hearings.
- Attend all appointments with treatment providers including:
 - Psychiatric appointments
 - Individual counseling
 - Group counseling
 - Case management
- Keep case manager advised of your current address or location.
- Obey all municipal, state and federal laws, as always.
- Abstain from use of illegal substances and refrain from alcohol use as it may have an effect on prescribed medication.
- Other: _____

Positive Reinforcements in Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Court (Rewards)

As you successfully progress through the AOT Court Program, the Court and your treatment team will recognize your success and commend you for your good work. Some of the positive reinforcements you can expect are:

- Praise from the bench
- Advancement to the next phase of the program
- Reduction in court appearances
- Reduction in supervision
- Increase in personal freedoms
- Certificates, mementoes, or other incentives
- Placement at the beginning of the court docket
- Early graduation

Consequences of Non-Compliance

As you successfully progress through the levels of the program, the level of monitoring by the Court and your treatment team may be reduced. However, if you fail to comply with your treatment plan, including taking prescribed medications and keeping scheduled appointments, the court may take any of the following actions:

- Extend the length of time that you are in the AOT Court Program
- Delay of the completion of a phase
- Increase the frequency of your court appearances
- Increased reporting requirements – adjust treatment expectations
- Order your treatment plan to be reviewed and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan
- Increased appointments with providers or support groups
- Court order for transportation to a hospital emergency department or an emergency evaluation to determine your need for re-hospitalization
- Hospitalization

**HILL COUNTRY COMMUNITY MHMR CENTER
AUTHORIZATION AND CONSENT FOR THE
DISCLOSURE OF PROTECTED HEALTH INFORMATION**

**NAME
CASE**

Patient: _____ SSN: _____ DOB: _____

I authorize and request the _____ to provide/receive the following
(name of organization)
information with regard to my clinical/hospital records on (specify dates of treatment): _____

If I am signing as a parent/guardian/managing conservator of a minor or guardian of the person of an adult, I
further understand the record released may contain references to family and myself.

Provide to/Receive from: _____

I understand that such disclosure will be made for the following purpose:

- _____ To assist in additional funding _____ To coordinate discharge placement/planning
_____ To assist in evaluation and treatment _____ To assist in educational placement
_____ To provide information to person(s) _____

_____ To request that the following information/authorizations (in addition to school records) be provided to assigned
Service Coordinator:

- Notification of all ARD meetings
- Copy of IEP (Individual Education Plan) resulting from any ARD Meetings
- Visits and observations in the classroom and/or work locations
- Information regarding outcome of IEP implementation from teachers and other staff

I also authorize the disclosure/use/receipt of my health information regarding:

- HIV/AIDS (pursuant to Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 81, Subchapter F)
 Alcohol and drug abuse treatment (pursuant to 42 CFR, Part 2, Confidentiality of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Patient Records)

Other _____

And will be limited to the following specific types of information:

I understand that I have the right to refuse to sign this authorization. Hill Country CMHMRC will not withhold treatment, Medicaid benefits, or payment processing if I refuse to sign this authorization. I will receive a copy of this signed authorization.

I understand that if I am authorizing disclosure of information, then, except for information related to alcohol or drug abuse treatment, the potential exists for the information described in this authorization to be re-disclosed by the recipient. If the information is re-disclosed, then it is no longer protected by medical privacy laws.

I understand that I (or my personal representative, if any) have the right to revoke this authorization. To revoke this authorization, I must deliver a written statement, signed by my representative or me, to the organization or facility where I gave my authorization (identified above), which provides the date and purpose of this authorization and my intent to revoke it. My revocation will be effective the date it is received by the organization/facility, except to the extent that the organization/facility has already relied upon my authorization to use or disclose my health information as described in the Notice of Privacy Practices.

AUTHORITY: MHMR	FORM NUMBER: VL5a	REVISED: 05/21/03
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If not earlier revoked, this authorization shall terminate on: _____.

Consumer

Date

Representative

Date

Relationship to Consumer

Witness

Date

Address

NOTE: A photocopy or facsimile is as valid as the original

AUTHORITY: MHMR	FORM NUMBER: VI.5a	REVISED: 05/21/03
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Hays County Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program Release of Information

Full Name of Participant	
Date of Birth	
Address	
Phone Number	
Email	

I authorize the following individual or organization to share information with the Hays County AOT Program, Attorneys, Prosecutors, and Hill Country MHDD/Axis to Mental Healthcare/Austin Oaks for continuity of care and legal purposes.

Organizaton/Individual	
Phone Number	
Address	
Email:	
Relationship to Participant	

The information I am agreeing can be shared between these two entities include the following:

	Developmental Information		Confirmation of Attended and Upcoming Appointments
	Educational Information		Mental Health Information
	Financial Information		Social History
	Legal Information		Engagement Status
	Medical Information and Medication Compliance		Other:

I understand that I may revoke this authorization in writing at any time (please initial)

This authorization will expire on _____ (If date is not specified, expiration is two years from date signed).

Printed Name _____

Signature _____

Date: _____

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will I be in the Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) Program?

AOT is generally a minimum of 90 days. Your original commitment can be extended every 90 days for up to 1 year by the court at the recommendation of you and your treatment team. You may request a hearing with the court if it has been more than 180 days since your last hearing.

What do I need to do to complete the AOT Program?

This is up to you and your treatment team. If you are adhering to your treatment plan and have not had any complications, the court will determine when your commitment expires based on recommendations from the treatment team.

What happens if I am sick or forget an appointment?

You must contact your case manager immediately, provide a reason for missing an appointment, and reschedule as soon as possible.

What if I do not want to take the medication(s) that have been prescribed?

Your psychiatrist has prescribed the medication felt to best address the symptoms of your mental illness. If you are unable to tolerate the side effects and want to request a change in medications, immediately discuss this with your psychiatrist. Remember, not taking your medication may result in any of the appropriate consequences listed above.

Am I allowed to speak to the Judge?

Yes, you are encouraged to speak to the judge and respectfully voice any concerns you may have at AOT Status Meetings.

Is there any cost to participate in the AOT Program?

No. If you do not currently have medical insurance, costs will be covered by the AOT Program and the County.

**Remember, the AOT Team is here to help you!
Please discuss any questions or concerns you may have with your Case
Manager and care team.**