

Sobering Centers

City Council Oversight Committee

January 2024



What are Sobering Centers?

Sobering centers are designed to provide a safe environment for intoxicated individuals to recover from the influence of alcohol and drugs.

Goals of these types of facilities include:

- Providing care for homeless alcohol-dependent persons and improved health outcomes.
- Decrease the number of inappropriate ambulance trips and emergency department (ED) visits for homeless alcohol-dependent individuals.
- Create a law enforcement alternative to booking individuals arrested for public intoxication.

Source: <https://www.acep.org/by-medical-focus/mental-health-and-substanc-use-disorders/sobering-centers>



FIRSTSTEP – OKC Metro Alliance

Public Inebriate Alternative (PIA) in partnership with the Oklahoma City Police Department

- Provides 24/7 alternate to arrest and jail for public intoxication
- Individuals are not under arrest and not charged with any other crime
- Individuals must voluntarily accept PIA admission
- Normally the length of stay is 10 hours
- Individuals have access to meals, showers, sleep, referrals to other services, and a ride home

Source: okcmetroalliance.com



FIRSTSTEP – OKC Metro Alliance - continued

Approximately 2500 admissions per year

Benefits of the program:

- PIA individuals avoid court costs and charges
- Approximate savings of 37,730 in taxpayer money per month (452,760 yearly)
- Police officers save time over conventional jail book-ins
- Cost is approximately 350,000 per year

Source: okcmetroalliance.com



Grand Addiction Recovery Center - Tulsa

Approximately 700-900 admissions per year

54% of participants are homeless

Benefits of the program:

- Co-located with both drug/alcohol treatment center and a mental health crisis unit
- 15-18% of individuals enter into substance abuse programs
- Operates a 16 person street outreach team (operates 24/7) that is able to remove an average of 39 people from the streets each month (some of these people revert to homeless status)
- City of Tulsa pays 250,000 per year for the service. I believe there are other sources of income as well

Source: Scott Whitefield, director



Norman Police Statistics

In 2023 the Norman Police Department made 634 arrests for public intoxication type behaviors. This includes both juvenile and adult arrests as well as alcohol and/or drug related types of intoxication.

Public intoxication counts by individual arrests

Subject Count	2020	2021	2022	2023
Count Over 14 to 15	1	1	0	3
Count 6 to 14	4	2	9	2
Count 2 to 5	31	34	42	51
Count of 1	291	310	374	427
Grand Total	327	347	425	483

CNT	Subject ID	2020	2021	2022	2023	Grand Total	Homeless
1	-841564	9	15	10	14	48	YES
2	-911385	14	1	12	3	30	NO
3	-900067	1	3	11	15	30	YES
4	-948584	1		6	14	21	YES
5	-898125	7	2	5	6	20	YES
6	-162504		5	6	4	15	YES
7	-921095	2	5	4	3	14	YES
8	-184903		6	4	4	14	NO
9	-887362		1	6	2	9	YES
10	-934925		2	5	1	8	YES
11	-807100		1	6	1	8	NO
12	-677688		1	1	5	7	YES
13	-396536		1	1	4	6	YES
14	-847204		2	1	2	5	YES
15	-400019	1	1	1	2	5	NO
16	-896222		1	2	1	4	NO
17	-894612		1	1	2	4	NO
18	-880880		1	1	1	3	NO

56 individuals were arrested for public intoxication two times or more. One individual has been arrested 48 times over the past four years.



Literature Review

Characteristics of individuals using sobering centers for multiple visits:

- Male
- Homeless
- History of alcohol dependency and abuse
- Have other health related issues, both physical and psychiatric
- Other drug use



Recommendations

- Design should treat a root cause of homelessness – alcohol and drug addiction
- 24/7 operation
- Medical staff onsite
- Multiple admission methods – police, other social services, walk-ins, local healthcare agencies
- Co-located with other services such as mental health care and detox/addiction services



Literature References

Fischer, M., Iorde, M., Meischke, H., & Husain, S. (2020). Lessons learned from a sobering center pilot for acute alcohol intoxication in South King County, Washington. *Journal of Substance Abuse*, 27(2), 123-127

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Warren, O., Smith-Bernardin, S., Jamieson, K., Zaller, N., & Liferidge, A. (2016). Identification and practice patterns of sobering centers in the United States. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 27, 1843–1857

