



Administrative Office of the Courts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Court launches assisted outpatient treatment program in northwestern New Mexico

FARMINGTON – A new court program serving San Juan County offers help to people with severe mental illness who have repeatedly failed to adhere to treatment on a voluntary basis.

The Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program launched last month in the Eleventh Judicial District Court allows family members, behavioral health providers and others to ask a district court to require qualifying individuals ages 18 and older to participate in community-based treatment while under the court's supervision. Decisions are made through a [civil legal process](#) that protects a person's due process rights.

"The AOT program places people on a path to potential recovery through the combination of individualized treatment within the community and court oversight," said Chief Justice Julie J. Vargas.

Currently, state law provides a civil procedure for the involuntary hospitalization of people with mental illness who are likely to harm themselves or others. AOT offers an alternative to hospitalization by providing assistance in a less restrictive community setting while having an individual remain under judicial supervision.

"The program helps people access needed treatment while safely staying connected to their families and communities. The goal is to improve outcomes for recovery, reduce unnecessary hospitalizations and incarceration, and enhance public safety," said Eleventh Judicial District Chief Judge R. David Pederson.

How AOT works

- After a petition is filed, a district court holds a hearing to determine whether an individual qualifies for the program under the law.
- At the direction of the court, a behavioral health provider prepares a treatment plan for the individual that includes input from the AOT participant, family and friends.
- A court-led team assists individuals in obtaining treatment and other services such as housing and food assistance.
- The court holds the program participant and the behavioral health provider accountable to ensure the participant adheres to the treatment plan.

Who qualifies for AOT

Individuals 18 and older may be eligible for assisted outpatient treatment if they:

- Are diagnosed with a serious mental disorder.
- Have a history of not complying with treatment voluntarily, resulting in self-harm, violent behavior or threats to others as well as repeated instances of hospitalization or incarceration.
- Would benefit from AOT to prevent a relapse or further deterioration of their condition.

Courts as problem solvers

“Five judicial districts are now running AOT because courts and community behavioral health providers are solving this together, not separately. That partnership is what helps people engage with treatment and find real stability in their lives,” said Karl Reifsteck, director of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Courts operate AOT programs in the Eleventh Judicial District, the First Judicial District of Santa Fe, Los Alamos and Rio Arriba counties, the Second Judicial District in Bernalillo County, the Third Judicial District in Doña Ana County, and the Fourth Judicial District of San Miguel, Mora and Guadalupe counties.

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Julie J. Vargas
Chief Justice
New Mexico Supreme Court



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