



THE OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH & SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES PARTNERS WITH THE OKLAHOMA TURNPIKE AUTHORITY TO KEEP TRAVELERS SAFE

The new initiative gives Oklahomans easy access to harm-reduction resources

OKLAHOMA (AUGUST 28, 2023) – The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS), in partnership with the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, will bring life-saving resources to Oklahomans in the form of Narcan and Fentanyl Test Strips. Both products will be available through a unique and eye-catching vending machine, placed at seven of the state’s busiest travel centers along turnpikes, which serve about 1 million travelers each day.

This initiative will bring education and awareness about substance use disorders, as well as provide free medicine to vulnerable Oklahomans.



“Accidental overdose is the leading cause of death in the United States for those 18 – 50 years old,” said Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Services Commissioner Carrie Slatton-Hodges said. “We have an opportunity to save lives if we all work together. ODMHSAS is thankful for our partnership with the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority as we seek to serve every corner of our state.”





In addition to offering the vending machines at public locations on turnpikes, OTA also recently added Narcan and fentanyl test strips to the first aid kit of more than 350 agency maintenance and construction vehicles due to the potential for workers to possibly be exposed to these substances when working crash sites. A recent crash on the SH-375/Indian Nation Turnpike where a vehicle overturned that was transporting opioid medications and fentanyl is an example of why OTA is joining this program.



ODMHSAS provides Naloxone and Fentanyl Test Strip training to OTA staff following the incident mentioned to help workers spot the signs of an overdose following an overturned vehicle.

“Safety of the traveling public is the top priority of the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority. Offering this potentially life-saving resource for anyone in need at our service plazas is just another way our agency can contribute to the safety of our patrons,” said OTA Deputy Director Joe Echelle. “We greatly appreciate the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services’ initiative to provide these materials and the training to help us protect our employees and better serve the traveling public.”

ODMHSAS will place 40 unique vending machines in strategic ZIP code locations where overdose prevalence is high, making this the largest-scale initiative in the U.S.

Two vending machines will be located at the I-44/Will Rogers Turnpike service plaza in Vinita with the intent to offer these materials as a resource to travelers at additional locations by the end of this year on turnpikes in Eastern and Southwestern Oklahoma.

A full list of machines can be found here on the okimready.org website.

In 2020 alone, national drug overdoses increased by 31%, with nearly 92,000 lives lost that year. More than 70% of these overdoses were driven by opioids, including synthetic

opioids such as fentanyl. In Oklahoma, there are nearly 1,000 accidental overdose deaths related to opioids every year.

Naloxone is an opioid antagonist, binding to opioid receptors to reverse and block the effects of opioids. Fentanyl Test Strips are small strips of paper that can detect the presence of fentanyl in various types of substances. Both are available to Oklahomans free of charge and temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose until first responders arrive. Please always remember to always call 911 if you suspect an overdose.

While nearly 300,000 Oklahomans report having a substance use disorder, the statistics show that about 90% of individuals who receive evidence-based treatment report they get better.

The [CDC reports](#) that nearly 40% of overdoses had a bystander present who could have intervened, conveying the importance of ensuring all Oklahomans have access to these life-saving resources.

“Substance use disorder is a chronic, treatable disease that individuals can recover from and go on to live healthy lives when provided with effective tools, which is why it’s critical for us to provide free and easy access to treatment in the state,” Slatton-Hodges continued.

In addition to the vending machines, Oklahomans have access to free Naloxone and Fentanyl Test Strip kits online as well. For more information and access to resources, visit okimready.org.

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About ODMHSAS

ODMHSAS operates a comprehensive network of statewide programs dedicated to meeting the needs and improving the quality of lives for all Oklahomans through efficient and easily accessible services. For individuals faced with mental health and addiction challenges, ODMHSAS offers one of the nation’s most comprehensive community-based treatment continuums in the U.S. In addition, the ODMHSAS prioritizes prevention and recovery programs aimed at promoting well-being and reducing substance use to help enhance protective factors across every Oklahoma community.

ABOUT OKLAHOMA TURNPIKE AUTHORITY

The Oklahoma Turnpike Authority provides a safe and convenient user-funded transportation network that interfaces seamlessly with the state highway system,

offering motorists a choice in travel options. OTA receives no state appropriations. PIKEPASS account holders receive the most cost-effective toll rate and is interoperable with turnpike systems in Kansas, Texas and Florida. All Oklahoma turnpikes will have open-road tolling by the end of 2024 through PIKEPASS and the PlatePay video tolling system.