

## TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

### Episode 50: Better Health and Wellness After the Pandemic

January 31, 2025

Summary: The TSET Better Health Podcast dropped its first episode in March 2020, coinciding with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Episode 50 revisits some health challenges many faced during the lockdown and offers tips to improve health and well-being now, almost five years later. Jennifer Goodrich, a licensed professional counselor, CEO of Pivot, Inc., and featured guest in Episode 2, returns to discuss barriers to wellness and lessons learned from the pandemic, and advice on caring for one's mental, emotional and physical health today. In addition, TSET Campaigns Manager Chase Harvick explains how and why the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline is helping more Oklahomans than ever quit tobacco use, the leading cause of preventable health in our state.

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#### **[Theme music]**

James Tyree: Hello everyone; welcome to Episode 50 of the TSET Better Health Podcast. This is your host James Tyree, associate director of Integrated Communications at TSET ...

Sarah Carson: And I am Sarah Carson, campaign manager for TSET. Thank you for joining us today. James mentioned this being our 50<sup>th</sup> episode and it seems we have been celebrating landmark anniversaries and occasions here. TSET is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and early last year we commemorated the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We will hear more on the Helpline later in this 50<sup>th</sup> podcast episode.

J. Tyree: I still remember Episode No. 1, which came out in March 2020 just as our whole society was going into the COVID-19 lockdown. What a time to start a new venture! There was so much uncertainty and upheaval at the time, and the sudden changes and health emergency around us could easily affect our health and overall well-being.

S. Carson: In this episode, we take a look back on health and wellness during the pandemic and what has changed since then. One very important way to improve health is to avoid and quit tobacco, and we will hear later from a TSET colleague on exactly how the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline has been a constant in helping Oklahomans quit tobacco for more than 20 years. We will also check back with one of the podcast's very first guests.

J. Tyree: In fact, this licensed professional counselor and CEO of an Oklahoma City non-profit was our featured guest in our second-ever episode, when she helped listeners maintain their mental and overall well-being during the first few weeks of the pandemic. Let's meet her again.

J. Goodrich: My name is Jennifer Goodrich and I am the president and CEO at Pivot - A Turning Point for Youth, and I just celebrated my 25th year here at Pivot.

- J. Tyree: What is Pivot, what services do you offer and to whom?
- J. Goodrich: Pivot has been around since 1972, so almost 53 years. We started out as Youth Services for Oklahoma County and we're an outreach counseling center for young people that were coming out of juvenile justice centers and that sort of thing, and reunifying with their families and then have just grown over the years.
- J. Goodrich: In 2018, we rebranded to Pivot - A Turning Point for Youth, really to be more in line with who we are and what we do.
- We primarily serve young people between the ages of 12 and 24 in three key populations. Young people that are in DHS custody or aging out of care, juvenile justice, and then the third population oftentimes find themselves in those two first populations, and those are young people experiencing homelessness, and that's anything from couch-surfing to being unsheltered and everything in between. We just wrap around them in hope-centered services that are meeting the needs of housing, sheltering, and basic needs, overall health, permanent connections, and then education and employment. So each one comes to us and we create an individual plan to help them reach their goals.
- J. Tyree: You had been around counseling and helping people, especially younger ones, for a long time. But what was it like for you when COVID-19 hit?
- J. Goodrich: When I think back to that time, I think, number one, was just all the unknown that we all experienced. And it wasn't just everyday people seeking services, that sort of thing, but it was the experts too. I'd been in the mental health field a very long time and had never experienced anything like it. And then running an agency in that time and people are looking to you for answers, we were all doing the best we could and being flexible and adapting and all of those sorts of things. So you can imagine we have the resources and the knowledge, and if you didn't, then that was a challenge also.
- J. Goodrich: I think that another thing is it really highlighted that lack of resources and the chasm between those that had them and who didn't really widened. And if you were already kind of living by a string, oftentimes that was snatched away and you were even farther behind and struggling.
- J. Tyree: How was it especially hard for younger people, and especially those you and your staff worked with?
- J. Goodrich: For young people, they lost one of the things that are vital to contributing to their development, and that's connection outside of the family. In that developmental stage, that's when we're finding out who we are. We do it through peers and all of those experiences, and that got shut down. And so I think that's why we've seen a lot of the consequences of that. Just that disconnection and isolation. Families were stuck

together, for better or for worse. Even in the best circumstances, it was hard. So challenges to the education system. There just lots of different things. It impacted every facet of our lives.

J. Goodrich: I think for me at the forefront of it is it really brought things like anxiety and isolation and those sorts of things to the forefront of the conversation, and there was finally some recognition about, yeah, when things are hard, it is difficult and it impacts us, our physical health, our emotional health, and that sort of thing. So I think that that's one of the things that came out of it.

J. Tyree: Though the isolation hit teens and young adults hard, that really is a problem from people of all ages. So those were difficulties, but did you see anything good emerge from the lockdown?

J. Goodrich: I think telehealth and Zoom and connecting in a new way became a game changer. So people who were maybe not accessing services before, connecting with people in that way, now that became an option. Big systems, insurance companies, Medicaid providers, all of that sort of thing saw that and said, "Hey, we need to be sure that we make an avenue where people can do that." And so I think that was one of those things.

I think, too, because we were home and we were scrolling on social media and those sorts of things, there was some opportunity for people to learn some tools. And this can be both a positive and negative. You need to find somebody who's legitimate and skilled and knows what they're talking about. But there were ways to get support. Like, if you were experiencing anxiety, there was a way to listen to a podcast to be able to see somebody who had that experience and were giving daily ways to boost and support people while they were going through it.

J. Tyree: It's really good that increased awareness and access to getting the support one needs has grown in these past few years.

J. Goodrich: I looked it up and 40% of entities, businesses, whatever, internationally increase their employee assistance programs during that time. So they recognized, "Hey, we need to take care of people and we need to take care of their mental health." I know at Pivot alone, we had kind of an EAP program, but we were blessed because we're a United Way partner agency, and they gave us an opportunity to really have a robust one. And then when that funding went away, it was definitely something that, as an organization, we were like, "This is a priority. We have to have this. It's helping so many people and it's something that we are going to prioritize." And I think a lot of companies did that and continue to do that.

J. Tyree: In your experience with clients and even staff, how does taking care of yourself physically factor into one's emotional and mental well-being? How do you help others make that connection?

J. Goodrich: Yeah, and we've traditionally done that, but we're able to really heighten it. And I think, first and foremost, it is making that connection, that, "Hey, when you go out and take a walk, it helps your mental health," When you are addressing your mental health, your anxiety, your depression, those sorts of things, you are going to make better decisions about how you cope with stress. And so really highlighting what that interconnection is, is, first and foremost, the thing that we try to do.

J. Goodrich: We offer a wide variety of resources. Like, "You want to quit smoking, here's this resource." And not just, "Go call them," But, "Let's help you get signed up for it. Here's a great grocery list or how you eat healthy," And those sorts of things. We offer cooking classes, we do healthy relationships, all of the different facets of wellness. In our holistic approach, we really understand that and highlight that with the people that we serve. It just is so important. Information is power, so always resources, resources, and resources. And not just, again, giving them, but helping them walk through that process and being sure that what you're linking them to is valuable.

J. Tyree: To what degree does physical health factor into one's overall health and well-being?

J. Goodrich: Yeah, I think for each person it's different. It might be 60% of this person's battle and 40% of this other person's, but I think it's that consistent conversation about, they are connected. And so if you are experiencing anxiety or depression, it's always asking, "What are you doing physically? How are you feeding your body?" Making that connection for them and then always be asking those questions. Because you can make the connection once, but if no one continues to follow up, it's not going to sustain. And so I think that's part of it also, just making sure it's always part of that conversation.

J. Tyree: It's now 2025. The pandemic is behind us, but we can still face a lot of stress or difficult situations that can wear a person down and diminish well-being. What steps would you advise to protect one's health and well-being?

J. Goodrich: I think step number one is acknowledging it, right? Being aware, understanding what's happening. That's part of it, but also, it's okay, right? Everyone experiences stress. Everyone's going to have moments of these sorts of things. It doesn't mean you failed, it doesn't mean that there's no hope, it doesn't mean it's the end. Those sorts of things. There's got to be that balance of, "Yeah, it's not great right now, and that's okay." Reach out. There's so many great options, so many wonderful opportunities to take care of your physical health, your mental health, that sort of thing. If you need immediate help, if it's mental health, call 988, go to an emergency room, those sorts of things. But definitely seek out those services. 211 can also help refer to those. There might be an agency in your neighborhood, whatever that looks like. Talk to friends. I bet you someone is seeking services or getting that kind of support and help.

J. Goodrich: And then I would also say, take care of yourself. Any small step that you can take, which sometimes is that recognition that things aren't going the way that you want them to,

any small step you can take today is going to help you get to where you want to be tomorrow. And sometimes that's a walk, sometimes that's eating a salad instead of french fries, sometimes that is calling your therapist. It can look all different kinds of ways, and all of them are important, but you have to start somewhere.

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S. Carson: I remember the first few days, even months of the pandemic, with the sudden changes and uncertainties and, of course, the major health impacts of that time. We all felt them, but the pandemic's impacts could be felt even deeper among those facing other life challenges, like those assisted by Pivot. I really appreciate Jennifer Goodrich coming back to the podcast to share her insights.

You know, Jennifer's emphasis on resources rings true for people of any age and circumstance who want to live better and feel healthier. She mentioned the connection between physical health and our overall well-being, and one very helpful place to turn for that is Shape Your Future. The Shape Your Future website offers easy and affordable tips to help people eat better and be more active.

J. Tyree: And that is true for many of us, with our busy schedules involving work and getting kids to school or day care, and with the cost of groceries getting ever higher. We want meals and snacks that are affordable but also taste good and are good for us.

S. Carson: It's also important to get up and move around. Adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate-level physical activity per week to maintain good health, and tips and videos found at [shapeyourfutureok.com](http://shapeyourfutureok.com) can help us hit that goal, even when we're at work or busy at home.

J. Tyree: Another component to healthy living found at [shapeyourfutureok.com](http://shapeyourfutureok.com) and that Jennifer referred to is living tobacco free, whether by never starting in the first place or by quitting. Smoking is the No. 1 cause of preventable death in both our state and nation, but nicotine in all tobacco and vaping products is very addictive and hard to quit.

S. Carson: But resources help, as we heard Jennifer say, and the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline is a *free* resource that has helped many thousands of Oklahomans successfully quit tobacco. James, you recently spoke with a TSET colleague about the Helpline and its impact before, during and since the pandemic. Let's hear what he had to say.

Chase Harvick: I am Chase Harvick, and I'm a campaign manager at TSET. I manage the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline and Tobacco Stops With Me. Those are the brands that I oversee.

J. Tyree: Chase, can you tell us a bit more about the Helpline, like how long it's been around and how many people it has served?

C. Harvick: Sure. The Helpline is a free service. It's provided by TSET to help Oklahomans quit tobacco. It offers free nicotine replacement therapy like patches, gum and lozenges at no cost, to help people manage their withdrawal symptoms. We also provide personalized quit plans that are tailored to individual needs and preferences. The Helpline also offers coach support ... and this is really important ... one-on-one sessions via phone or text to provide guidance and support. James, my favorite stat is people who use the Helpline are more than twice as likely to succeed than those who go it alone.

Speaking of celebrations, the Helpline celebrated its 20th anniversary last year with a fantastic event held at the Capitol. Since its inception in 2003, the Helpline has seen more than 600,000 registrations. Can you believe that?

J. Tyree: In this episode, we are looking back on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the health of Oklahomans and how we're doing since then, hopefully for the better. Did the pandemic seem to have any effect on people using tobacco or wanting to quit through the Helpline?

C. Harvick: You bet. James, before we do that, let me just wish you and Sarah a happy new year and a big congratulations on 50 episodes. It's been such a pleasure to work alongside such dedicated professionals during my almost five years at TSET, and I'm just so thrilled that the podcast continues to thrive.

You said it. 2020 was a difficult time for many of us, and helplines across the nation saw that reflected in their registration numbers. We dropped from 28,500 registrations the year before to under 20,000 for the first full year of the pandemic. Just on a personal note, this was also my first full year on the job, and it was quite the jarring introduction. I was a little worried that I was just stinking up the joint, but thankfully we were not alone in seeing that. It was a collective impact.

J. Tyree: Yeah, that's understandable and a little frightening.

C. Harvick: I think people were more concerned with just getting through the day. People were out of work, people were sick or they had family members who were sick, and it was just a jarring cultural moment. Thankfully, we've been on the uptick ever since. Our most recent year, FY24, we had over 27,000 registrations, and we were up about 6 percent year over year. Other quitlines have also reported recovering from their pandemic dips.

J. Tyree: That is encouraging. So what is happening now, post-pandemic, and how effective is the Helpline in helping people quit tobacco use?

C. Harvick: We had a great year in FY24. I encourage listeners to check out our annual report on the TSET website. Like I mentioned, we saw over 27,000 registrations last year, and that's up over 5.5% from the last year. We had a high satisfaction rate. People who use the Helpline reported a 97% satisfaction rate, and I want to brag on this for just a second. The people who reported at least one month tobacco-free at the seven-month mark, 44.4% of users, almost half of people who use the helpline, reported quitting tobacco for at least a month, and that is the highest that we've ever seen. We were just thrilled. I think that the North American Quitline Consortium, NAQC, reports a baseline of about 30%. We are about 15% higher than that baseline, so that's a huge jewel in our crown for the Helpline. I also want to point out, a little over a year and a half ago we transitioned to a new platform called Rally with the Helpline. Rally really emphasized the online enrollment and made the process much more user-friendly. It's so much easier now to sign up online than it used to be.

Last year, for the first time we saw more people registering online than by any other method, so that's brand-new. We had I think it was 52 or 53% of people register for the Helpline online as opposed to any other method. Usually it's we'll see that number, it's been crawling up gradually over the years, but I think Rally really pushed it over the line.

J. Tyree: That's pretty interesting. Any other recent trends worth noting?

C. Harvick: Sure. Well, you bet. One of the biggest changes, I think people have probably noticed this in our marketing and communications efforts, but we started limited-time offers. As I told you, during the pandemic everyone was struggling to get registration numbers, and we created a limited-time offer. Our baseline nicotine replacement therapy offer's two weeks, and everyone gets two weeks. During the limited-time offer window, we upped that to eight weeks.

We offered four times the usual nicotine replacement therapy for people who signed up during that window, and we saw tremendous success, and we have kept the limited-time offers coming. It creates a great opportunity for someone who might need just a little extra nudge to commit to quitting tobacco. That would probably be an example of how things have changed post pandemic.

J. Tyree: We've talked about the Helpline itself, but we must remember the "why." It's about preserving health and lives.

C. Harvick: You bet. People forget about tobacco in the news. Twenty years ago there were all the court cases, and it was much more visible when 40% of society use tobacco as opposed to around 10 to 15% now, depending on where you live, but smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. Almost half a million Americans die every single year as a result of smoking.

C. Harvick: Most people know about the cancer and lung disease risks that come with tobacco, but very few know that it increases your risk of type 2 diabetes by up to 40%. It's also the leading cause of heart disease and causes reproductive problems in both men and

women. The big three motivators for quitting tobacco are health, financial health and family.

Most smokers want to quit, but they're afraid to try and fail again. I would just encourage those folks to reach out anyway, talk to a coach, get a quit plan in place, set a quit date. Change is possible. Of course, people can access the Helpline. They can call 1-800-QUIT-NOW, or they can visit [okhelpline.com](http://okhelpline.com) to get started. It's super easy. These are free resources that are here for you. Like I said, even if you're not ready to quit, if you're thinking about quitting, we can help you get where you need to be.

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- J. Tyree: A lot has changed in the nearly five years since the podcast's first episode launched, in what we do and how, but the basics for better health remain the same. Nutrition, physical activity and avoiding tobacco and other harmful products.
- S. Carson: We know this, but stress and challenging life circumstances can make those basics hard to achieve. I think we can all relate to that, and it was magnified during the pandemic. But with encouragement and support from others and resources from TSET, we have the tools and capacity to live better.
- We'd like to thank our guests Jennifer Goodrich and Chase Harvick for sharing their time and information with us, and as always, we thank you, our listeners.
- J. Tyree: And I want to extend a special thank you on this 50<sup>th</sup> episode to my first co-host Cate Howell, a former intern with TSET Health Communication who came up with the podcast idea and was its first producer. Well done, Cate.
- S. Carson: If you want to hear any or all our episodes, be sure to visit our webpage at <https://oklahoma.gov/tset/podcast> or anywhere you listen to podcasts. Until next time, this is Sarah Carson ...
- J. Tyree: And James Tyree wishing you peace ...
- S. Carson: And better health.