

TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

Episode 58: Celebrating Independence With Better Health

June 1, 2026

Summary: As our nation celebrates 250 years of independence this summer, more Oklahomans are also enjoying the freedom that comes with healthier living. Episode 58 explores how and why individual choices and public policy can improve wellness over the long run. Today's guests are DeLanie Brewer, an Oklahoma City resident who has shared her inspiring health journey with Shape Your Future, Katie Qualls Fay of the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, and McKenzie Cowbeck, Oklahoma Public Health Association executive director.

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[Theme music]

James Tyree: Hello and happy birthday, America! Welcome to Episode 58 of the TSET Better Health Podcast. I am your host, James Tyree, associate director of Integrated Communications at TSET ...

Sarah Carson: And I am Sarah Carson, campaign manager for TSET. July 4th will mark 250 years of independence for the United States. It's a time to celebrate the many things we share in common as Americans and Oklahomans, like our inalienable rights that include life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

J. Tyree: And good health for ourselves, our loved ones and our community. We all really do want to feel good and feel well.

S. Carson: Good health is one of the greatest freedoms anyone can enjoy. In fact, you and I recently discussed how TSET brands align with the ideas of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

For instance, tobacco use is the No. 1 cause of preventable death, so the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline preserves life by helping thousands of Oklahomans quit tobacco for good. Tobacco Stops With Me advocates for the liberties of breathing tobacco-free clean air and uncovering the tobacco industry's deceptive marketing. And Shape Your Future provides many tips and resources for anyone pursuing the happiness of healthy living.

J. Tyree: Our guests today speak to each of those three areas from their distinct perspectives. You may have seen DeLanie Brewer in a Shape Your Future commercial. Well, she recently shared much more about her life, health journey and motivations with me and it was a fun and fascinating discussion that I'm sure you will enjoy and find inspirational.

S. Carson: We'll also hear from someone at the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline. Most are familiar with the Helpline, but you may not know exactly how it works, realize its high success or some popular reasons why Oklahomans turn to this great resource.

But let's first meet someone who is passionate for public health and the ways it benefits many of our state's 4 million residents.

M. Cowlbeck: My name is McKenzie Cowlbeck. My pronouns are she/her. I am the executive director of the Oklahoma Public Health Association that actually serves the entire state.

J. Tyree: Let's start with a basic but important question: What *is* public health and how would you define it?

M. Cowlbeck: I'm glad you said how would I define it because I think if I had the best definition, it would fix a lot of public health marketing and messaging issues that we're having these days. But I like to say that public health is the science of protecting and promoting the health and wellbeing of populations. And that can be done through programming, education, research, even policymaking. But whenever I'm talking to a layperson or not necessarily a public health practitioner, someone at the capital per se or my mom's friend who is asking me what the heck I do for my work, I like to describe public health as all the factors that go into influencing your health outside of the doctor's office.

And very honestly, sometimes we're in the doctor's office as well, thinking like vaccines. But some great examples are like clean air and clean water and road and workplace safety. Whether or not the rural town next door has a grocery store and whether they sell affordable produce and even safe affordable housing. All of that encompasses public health. And so OPHA likes to say all health is public health, and we live by that, and we practice it.

J. Tyree: We cherish individual freedoms and much of one's health is determined by individual and family choices. So why does **public** health matter?

M. Cowlbeck: We are a country and a people that really care about our ability to do what we want to do, what we think is right, when we want to do it. And that's very justified. But very simply put, public health influences all the factors that go into informing that individual or that family's decision making. And a great example is, like I mentioned a minute ago, if say, a family lives in a rural area in Oklahoma and they don't have a local grocery store, well, they don't necessarily have a choice in being able to go to the grocery store maybe every few days, once a week, pick up all the healthy, hopefully not super expensive groceries they need and then to be able to come home and cook up this healthy nourishing meal. If they don't have those options in front of them, it's not actually even a choice if they instead go to the fast food place down the street.

Sometimes there's an illusion of choice, and what public health does really is influence those factors that can hopefully help make the easiest choice, the healthiest choice or the safest choice.

J. Tyree: Where does policy fit in public health, and why is it important for a business, organization, school or city to adopt health-related policies and ordinances — even if they're already doing them in practice?

M. Cowlbeck: Well, to the first part of that question, I think policy fits very, very squarely in public health. Truthfully, that is sometimes hard for public health to do as a field that normally works for the state government or has a lot of state and federal funding and is hesitant to engage in policymaking or politics, if you will. Policy is a foundational tool that our field public health can use to influence those levers to make, like I mentioned earlier, the healthiest choices, the easiest choices for the populations that we serve. So even if folks are already making the healthy decisions, being able to put a policy in place, not just bolsters the healthy activities and supports these healthy choices that are already happening, but it affirms that those people are guaranteed those rights, if you will.

For example, if an office or business has always permitted one hour of exercise to be part of their workday, which that's a pretty great one, I think, it's in practice, but it's important to put it down on paper, if you will, and protect that healthy activity so that people make it not just a part of, "Oh, I happen to have one hour here and there in order to go do it." No, it's we're integrating healthy activities, healthy lifestyles and accessible healthy choices into our daily lives.

J. Tyree: Committing a healthy practice to policy protects that practice for the community, workplace, school or wherever both now and in the future.

M. Cowlbeck: Absolutely. Absolutely. Because I mean, at the end of the day, public health is a science, and like you're saying, the politicking comes and goes, and science changes whenever it's learning to do better, but the foundational getting exercise, eating healthy foods, minimizing substances that harm health, that's not going to change. And so you're exactly right if we can protect those practices and turn them into permanent policies and safeguard them against whatever baloney of the day is of interest from the folks who are in charge, I think that would serve our populations for the long haul and help stabilize healthy life and healthy choices as, again, the easiest default choice.

J. Tyree: Someone may care about clean air and their community providing tobacco-free public spaces, or perhaps some other important health issue, but may think "I'm only one person, what difference could I possibly make?" Well, how would you answer that person?

M. Cowlbeck: More and more people, I think, are getting frustrated with how hard it is to be healthy and stay healthy or how expensive it is to become or stay healthy. People are ready to speak up and do something. And I say to them, "You are one person and that is powerful. You have power in and of yourself. And as people living in this country, everyone has the right to call up their elected officials, whether that be local, state, federal, and make your voice heard." And I cannot tell you enough that at the lower levels, local and state government, a handful of voices, even one voice and especially in a state like Oklahoma where we don't have public comment, so people from across the state can't just show up and be able to talk to all of the legislators all at once.

Folks picking up the phone or scheduling a meeting to talk to their representatives, their senators, it actually makes a difference. It truly does. And I see that in my line of work because I work in public health policy.

It does matter. And even if just the act of you speaking up is important, it can make a difference to the people who are listening to you. It should if they're actually representing you. And then finally, you can also inspire those around you to do the same because one voice is relatively easy to turn one voice into two, into four, into a group who all care about the same thing, and it just took someone getting started.

J. Tyree: How does the Oklahoma Public Health Association support and strengthen the health of Oklahomans?

M. Cowlbeck: I'm really proud of OPHA, proud to be a part of it because we support, educate, and empower Oklahoma's public health workforce, which as of now we have about a thousand members, including 25 organizations ranging from state agencies to university programs, fellow nonprofits across a wide range of disciplines. We support them to do their best work to the best of their ability for the populations that we each respectively serve. And so the three primary services that we provide, I like to sum them up into professional development opportunities, which are events like our annual policy day or our annual conference that offers continuing education credit for lifelong and crew very long learning. And then second, as we provide status updates, policy debriefs and representation in Oklahoma's policymaking process, because like I mentioned earlier, public health has unfortunately been not too involved in the policymaking game, and it's about time that we make room for ourselves at the table.

And then lastly, we are as of late convening folks across health organizations, disciplines in the state under the umbrella of public health because we truly and firmly believe that all health is public health and that public health is the through line between all of our health disciplines. And if we collectively recognize that, that we all serve our populations because we want them to be healthier, safer, and live longer, happier lives. That's a pretty big group of people whose one voices add up to really become an influential, caring, effective group of health professionals who are ready to make the state a better place to live for everyone.

J. Tyree: Finally, McKenzie, what makes you personally care so much about public health?

M. Cowlbeck: I love that public health is broad and it ranges from oral health, maternal health, tobacco-free policy, and it recognizes the fact that all of those factors are intertwined. And I think whenever we live in a country whose health system really focuses on individual specific conditions, outcomes, medications, if we take that step back and invested more into public health, into those upstream factors that shape people's choices, shape how they get to live their lives, I think that's really powerful, and I feel very strongly that more people should be involved in it.

J. Tyree: Thank you for joining us today, McKenzie, and for your efforts to improve healthy environments for all Oklahomans.

M. Cowlbeck: Thank you. I appreciate it, James. Thank you so much for the invitation. I'm glad to be here.

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J. Tyree: Public health involves many areas relating to health and wellness, but they all boil down to enhancing our individual *and* collective well-being, quality of life and longevity. And the cool thing is we all can contribute to creating healthier living environments

S. Carson: While the field of public health is wide and expansive, tobacco cessation is one specific area that greatly improves one's health and lowers one's risks of cardiovascular diseases, cancer and other life-threatening illnesses. Quitting tobacco use can be difficult, but our next guest will share how someone can improve their odds of quitting for good.

K. Qualls Fay: Hi there. I am Katie Qualls Fay. I am the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline Coordinator and I work with the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, which is funded by TSET.

S. Carson: The Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline can help Oklahomans win their independence from tobacco use. How successful is the Helpline in relation to other ways to quit tobacco?

K. Qualls Fay: I love this question and I love the connection to independence. When someone tries to quit smoking cold turkey or just completely on their own, they have success less than 10% of the time, and when someone uses the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline, we're really proud to share that this last year over 45%, or nearly half, of the people who had called the Quit line for help stayed tobacco-free seven months after their enrollment. And ways that people can increase their success in quitting are by using the resources that we offer like coaching or the nicotine replacement therapy options like the gum, the

patches, the lozenges. And of course we would encourage, and the coaches would encourage, someone to have support from trusted people in their life like their family or their doctors and just communicate that they might need a little bit of extra encouragement. And all of those are things that work together to help people maintain their independence from tobacco use.

S. Carson: Is the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline only for those who want to quit cigarette smoking?

K. Qualls Fay: I think a lot of people assume that it is just for cigarettes, but the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline is more than happy to help people quit using any tobacco or nicotine product, and we also welcome people who use more than one product. So maybe someone uses smokeless snus dip tobacco and they use vapes. The helpline is able to support someone with using those things, whether it's often or sometimes or together.

S. Carson: So how does OTH work? Take us through the process.

K. Qualls Fay: So when someone makes the brave choice to quit using tobacco, they can call 1-800-QUIT NOW or if you don't have the numbers on your phone or the letters on your phone, that's 1-800-784-8669, or they can register online by visiting our website okhelpline.com. And the enrollment process takes about 20 to 30 minutes because the coach will want to get some information about the products you use, how often you use them, and different stressors in your life so that we can work to address and build an environment that allows you to stay tobacco-free. So from then, during the enrollment process, after you finish the intake, you're able to access resources through an online dashboard, someone will receive motivational text messages, and then they can have a coach reach out to them via phone, if that's what they choose to do, and have those coaching calls throughout the process. And then they can expect to receive their nicotine replacement options. So those gum, patches, lozenges, if they choose to use them, they can expect to receive those within 5 business days.

S. Carson: How much free coaching and nicotine replacement therapy can a participant receive?

K. Qualls Fay: So the standard amount that we would give is 4 weeks of nicotine replacement to any Oklahoman if they're indicated for it. So there are some health conditions where that may not be healthy for them, but if they meet the health requirements, they can be eligible for 4 weeks. And some insurances, depending on someone's insurance plan, they may be eligible to get more. People who are uninsured, we can work with them to get what they need there. But every Oklahoman is eligible for at least 4 weeks if that is healthy for them.

And then for coaching, everyone can get a few coaching sessions. Those specialty tracks, like I mentioned, some of those they're eligible for up to seven coaching sessions. But

anybody can log onto their dashboard at any time and there are some great resources on there, depending on different life circumstances or needs of individuals.

S. Carson: Who is eligible for Helpline services and how much do they cost?

K Qualls Fay: The helpline is completely free to all Oklahomans. We're really grateful to be able to offer this to anyone over the age of 18. So someone can register with the helpline if they are a teenager, but they are not eligible to receive nicotine replacement. That is only FDA approved for people over the age of 18. But someone who is a teenager that wants to quit, they can enroll with the helpline and have access, still, to that dashboard and those motivational texts, but any Oklahoman over the age of 18 is eligible for nicotine replacement and those coaching resources for free.

S. Carson: What if someone quits tobacco through the Helpline but then relapses. Can they register again for the Helpline, or is that person done?

K Qualls Fay: That's a great question and there is no shame in needing to ask for help. Again, we recognize this is a really difficult and brave choice for someone to quit using tobacco or nicotine, and so someone is eligible to enroll twice in a year if they are needing some support. So say somebody registers with the tobacco helpline on January 1st, they want to make a New Year's resolution, they go through some coaching calls, and around March they think, "Okay, I'm good." But then in April or May, they're like, "Wait, I need some more help," they can just basically have their account reactivated. Say that person enrolls in January, they make it all the way to Thanksgiving and then Thanksgiving's kind of stressful or maybe college football has them stressed out and they want some support, they would be re-enrolled, but the helpline would have their information so they could just reactivate their account.

S. Carson: What are some common reasons people have for wanting to quit tobacco?

K Qualls Fay: This is really important and I like that the coaches ask people about their desire to quit and their confidence in quitting because there's so many meaningful reasons that someone may want to quit using tobacco. And one of the most common reasons we hear, of course, is that desire to make a healthier choice and improve their long-term wellness. People realize they want to have more energy or better lung capacity to do the things that they love. People often say they want to quit for their loved ones like their kids, their grandkids, their significant other, or even their pets. They want to create a healthy environment for the people that they're around.

Other people recognize the financial benefits. They realize that quitting tobacco can save a lot of money and they want to spend that on other priorities. Some people say they're just tired of being dependent on something and they don't want to be held down. To use the independence theme, they want to be independent of something and

it's inconvenient to have this in their daily lives. And sometimes people quit because their doctors have encouraged them to do so for important health reasons like pregnancy or managing a chronic condition. Sometimes people get scared or a commercial comes on and they just really resonate with it and they realize today's the day. But we honor and like to collaborate with participants to keep that reason the forefront of their quitting journey.

S. Carson: Is there anything else you want people to know about the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline?

K Qualls Fay: I would just like to encourage people and let them know that, like I've mentioned, there are those special coaching support tracks for people who, say, PTSD or some kind of family stress or some mental health need makes it difficult to quit. And know, too, that these coaches are often former smokers themselves, and so they respond with empathy and encouragement and they come up with really creative strategies no matter what kind of obstacle a person is facing or what kind of job or daily schedule they keep. They're willing and able to be flexible and supportive where you are.

And we recognize, too, it can be really nerve wracking to talk to a stranger about the decision to quit smoking tobacco or using nicotine. And so I just would encourage people to remember and just feel comfortable and safe knowing that you're in good company because many of these coaches have been in your shoes too.

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S. Carson: It's worth knowing that since its launch in 2003, the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline has served more than 630,000 registrations. And as Katie mentioned, a recent survey showed that more than 45 percent of Helpline registrants stayed quit for more than seven months. That is remarkable, considering the national quitline benchmark is a 30 percent success rate, and even that mark is significantly higher than trying to go it alone.

You can learn more about the helpline or register for its free resources by visiting <https://www.okhelpline.com> or calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW.

J. Tyree: While the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline is an outstanding resource for quitting tobacco, Shape Your Future is the TSET brand that helps people live healthier, more active lives – no matter where they are in life. Our next guest was thrilled to discover recipes that are both delicious and healthy for her family at shapeyourfutureok.com. But her journey to a healthier life involves much more. Let's meet her now:

D. Brewer: I'm DeLanie Brewer and I live in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. I am a full-time caregiver, actually in HTS, for my son, Elijah, who's an adult, and he is profoundly autistic and nonverbal. And he's very hands-on, requires a lot of assistance throughout the day. So that's my main focus, my main concern that I do on a regular basis. I also help my husband with his business at the shop. He's a barber. And then I do acting whenever I

can. Theater and a little bit of film. I'm actually in a show right now at the Pollard Theater in Guthrie.

J. Tyree: You've also been featured in a Shape Your Future commercial. What prompted you to share your health journey?

D. Brewer: Wow. Well, it's crazy how many people come up to me out of nowhere. The lady at the drive is like, "You're the walking lady." And I'm like, "Yeah, I think that's me. Yes." And then I'm like, I'm so glad I ordered that chicken salad and not the big burrito like I wanted to.

They wanted somebody who had that actual, real story in their life to share their story with others. I was like, "Well, you know what? I actually do have a story," because I had just literally lost probably about 30 pounds at that point, almost probably close to 40 at that point, just because I decided to get up off my rear and get going.

J. Tyree: Let's dive into that story, but let's start by going way back. A lot of people remember – or still have – family gatherings around big meals and delicious foods. What was that experience like for you and what were your favorite dishes back then?

D. Brewer: Oh my goodness. My mama was a cooker. As we say, she would put her foot in it in the kitchen. And oh my goodness, she loved to bake things. That was like her love language. And so she would love to have people over and cook for people.

She loved to use a lot of seasonings and so she loved to make foods that would be like seasoned. And her cakes, oh my goodness, that was her specialty. She was very creative. She would, in between the layers of chocolate cake, like say if it was Christmas, she would crunch up peppermint candy and have peppermint in between the layers of the chocolate and the icing. And it would just be like, ooh, oh my goodness.

J. Tyree: At some point, you decided to eat healthy and be more physically active. Did an event or sudden realization prompt that shift, or was it more of a gradual evolution?

D. Brewer: When my sister passed – the MS got worse and worse, so it took over her whole body – and she was like the picture of health. So that was just really scary. That was about a year before COVID. And then right before COVID, my mother passed unexpectedly in an accident and that was just like devastating and they were like my rock and my support, my biggest cheerleaders. My mother grounded me and my sister gave me wings and they were the ones I turned to all the time just for everything, for advice, for inspiration, for creative insight and help and their input. And so when they both passed, it was just, oh man, it hit me so hard and I didn't realize it then, but I'm an emotional eater.

So it was just emotionally draining. And all that time I am eating, eating, eating, eating. And I probably gained about 20 pounds during that time. And since I'm traveling, she lived in Atlanta and I'm in Oklahoma City, so I was having to travel back and forth during COVID and I wasn't able to fit in the airplane seats anymore.

So when I come back from Atlanta, I'm at home with my three children stuck in the house and one is an adult with autism, so the house is loud and we are crowded and he's a runner and so there's a grown person running in our house and we're all stuck in there and so I needed to escape.

I was like, "Okay, I'm just going to go walk somewhere. I'm going to go walk." So COVID pushed me out the house and so I would go walking, but lo and behold, those walks were like my breath of fresh air. I could breathe like literally just grieve and breathe.

I've never been an online person, but here, I had nobody to talk to. I needed an outlet. So I actually pulled out my laptop and got online and I found this group called GirlTREK. GirlTREK was started by two best friends who were like sisters and they did guided, meditative walks.

They would have these conversations and it was like two best friends just talking, and it reminded me so much of sitting around the table with my cousins and my mom and my sister. And by the time the 30 minutes were over, my mind would be so just enthralled with what they were talking about that I didn't even realize I'd been walking for 30 minutes.

But their mission is to get a million African American women walking because of the fact that our highest co-morbidity rate comes from health issues like stress, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and all of those things can be curbed if not completely eliminated by your diet and your exercise.

And then in the process, guess what? I lost 40 pounds and it's like bonus. I mean, I was wanting to lose weight, but that wasn't my – I just needed to get away. I needed to breathe and the bonus is I lost weight doing it.

J. Tyree: What an incredible and emotional journey, DeLanie. So looking back, when you began incorporating healthier habits in your life and for your family, what was the easiest change or two to make, and what made it relatively easy?

D. Brewer: I'd say the easiest change was to just get out there and just do it. I had never been physically active like that before. I could have tennis shoes for years and they would be just fine before that. But just to get moving and you don't even have to go to a lake or to any place like that, a trail because I just like the scenery. But there are times when I just walk out my front door and just do that 30 minutes just down the block.

J. Tyree: Conversely, what was the toughest adjustment you had to make, and how are you pulling it off?

D. Brewer: The food, man, the food. Looking at food differently, putting it in a different priority and category. I got on a meal plan that I found and it worked wonders. However, just making food that's healthy and fixing it can be a real chore. I had to just figure out what are the foods that I need to be eating. I went back to my first meal plan, which really, it's not difficult, but it's just like getting those foods that are healthier, those ingredients, things that are fresh, you've got to go to the grocery store a little bit more, but it's just a matter of just switching your mindset.

I had to figure out different ways to do that and that food did not have to be the center focus of my life and that was the change. So many times we celebrate around food, but I started to think we can celebrate around good music without having the food be the focus and just finding other things to be the center of the celebration.

But the interesting thing is the more I take in the foods that I need to eat, those started becoming my favorite food. And other thing is that I've learned how to make some great salads. Salads don't have to be just lettuce and a cucumber. It can be chickpeas in there. You can throw mushrooms in there. You can throw sunflower seeds in there and make it tasty. You can put seasoning on there.

J. Tyree: How is Shape Your Future helping you now with meals?

D. Brewer: During the filming of the commercial, the meal that we made was not one that we had ever made before. It was something new that was introduced to us. It was sauteed chicken zucchini with the pesto and tomatoes and it was so delicious. It was so good. So we fix that on a regular basis, still.

I actually go to the website and just a couple of weeks ago, I got recipes for breakfast stuff because I needed some new ideas for breakfast and they had like an egg frittata thing on there that I grabbed onto and loved, that you could like pop in the oven and cook up like that. So yeah, I still go there to get different recipes, just to switch up. And I love how it's categorized because it's very easy to look through and they've got all the ingredients and the instructions and they've got it categorized, like breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks. And so it's really helpful. It really is.

J. Tyree: As our nation is about to mark a milestone birthday, what are you looking forward to in your future?

D. Brewer: I'll say one of the main goals of mine for just living healthier and eating healthier and getting moving is longevity of life. I want to be that woman who's walking around and jogging at the lake when she's 100 years old. I want to be that little old lady that's out

there still getting it, but I'm not going to be, my sister used to say, "DeLanie, if you're going to be like that when you're a little old lady, then you got to start now so you can live to be a little old lady." And so I'm like, I'm here for it and I'm eating to live, to live longer and I plan on walking into the future with America, and I'm ready.

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J. Tyree: Sarah, DeLanie is such a fun and compelling person to be around, and I am so glad she shared her story with Shape Your Future and then with us on the podcast. And honestly, you can also hear and sense all of our guests passion for personal and public health, so many thanks to DeLanie, McKenzie Cowlbeck of the Oklahoma Public Health Association and Katie Qualls Fay of the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline.

S. Carson: Gaining independence from tobacco use, a sedentary lifestyle and an unhealthy diet as well as the heightened risks for cancer, cardiovascular disease and Type II diabetes they bring is definitely worth celebrating every day. To learn how, we invite you to visit <https://okhelpline.com> for resources to quit tobacco and nicotine use, <https://stopswithme.com> for information on clean air policies and the tobacco industry's deceptive marketing practices, and <https://shapeyourfutureok.com> for healthy lifestyle tips.

J. Tyree: Another website to visit often is <https://oklahoma.gov/tset/podcast>, where you can listen to this or any episode of the TSET Better Health Podcast. They can also be downloaded anywhere you normally listen to podcasts.

S. Carson: Thank you for joining us today. Have a great day, a fun, safe and healthy summer and Independence Day, and until next time, this is Sarah Carson ...

J. Tyree: And James Tyree wishing you peace ...

S. Carson: And better health.