TEXAS SPECIALTY COURTS
STANDARDS FOR BEST PRACTICES
AND DATA COLLECTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
June 13, 2025

BACKGROUND

The *Texas Specialty Courts Standards for Best Practices and Data Collection* document, recommended by the Specialty Courts Advisory Council (SCAC) as prescribed in Section 772.0061(b)(1&2) of the Government Code, presented to the Texas Judicial Council as authorized in Section 71.037, and to be administered through the Office of Court Administration (OCA) pursuant to Section 121.002(f), sets forth a unified framework for specialty court operations across the state. These courts—ranging from drug courts and mental health courts to veterans, juvenile, and family treatment courts—address complex behavioral health issues through a collaborative, treatment-oriented model. The standards reflect the most current national research while incorporating Texas-specific needs and priorities.

PURPOSE AND INTENT

This document has two primary objectives:

1. **To establish best practice standards for specialty courts statewide**
   Drawing from leading national models (e.g., All Rise, Center for Children and Family Futures, OJJDP), these standards provide a clear distinction between *fundamental practices* (required for accreditation) and *commended practices* (recommended enhancements). They aim to guide courts in adopting proven strategies that improve outcomes, reduce recidivism, and enhance procedural fairness.

2. **To standardize data collection across programs**
   Historically, inconsistent reporting has limited Texas's ability to assess the overall effectiveness of specialty courts. These new standards require systematic data collection at all critical stages—from referral and enrollment to separation and post-program outcomes—ensuring that courts have the information they need to manage operations effectively and support data-driven decisions at the local and state levels.

ROLE OF TEXAS JUDICIAL COUNCIL

The Texas Judicial Council (TJC) plays an essential governance role in the specialty court system. The TJC is responsible for adopting and promoting the use of evidence-based practices for specialty courts in Texas. In 2016, the TJC formally adopted the All Rise Adult Drug Court Best Practice Standards as the baseline expectations for these courts. The Office of Court Administration oversees compliance and requires specialty courts to submit program performance data, as authorized by Chapter 121 of the Texas Government Code. These efforts ensure alignment with state policy goals and legislative priorities, while reinforcing accountability and transparency in the justice system.

BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

The categories presented below illustrate a selection of the identified best practice standards and categories, highlighting key areas of focus. However, they do not encompass the full spectrum of standards established.

1. **Roles and Responsibilities of the Judge**
   a. The Judge shall be educated on law and research related to specialty courts.
   b. The Judge shall attend pre-court staffing and conduct court review hearings.
   c. The Judge shall ensure if a substitute judge is needed that they are properly trained.

2. **Target Population**
   a. Eligibility criteria shall be objectively defined, evidence based, written, and communicated widely
   b. Validated clinical and risk assessments shall be completed to determine eligibility of participants

3. **Multi-disciplinary Team**
    a. Teams shall consist minimally of the judge or judicial officer, coordinator or program manager, probation officer or case manager, treatment providers, stakeholder attorneys, and law enforcement.
    b. MOUs shall be executed between agencies involved to clearly define roles.
    c. All team members shall attend pre-court staffing as well as the court review hearing.
    d. All team members shall advise the judge on matters related to their field of expertise so that appropriate decisions can be made regarding sanctions, incentives, and service adjustments.

4. **Substance Use, Mental Health, and Trauma Treatment and Recovery Management**
    a. Participants shall receive evidence-based treatment services as determined by a clinical assessment performed by a trained clinician.
    b. The Court shall offer a continuum of care to sufficient to meet the needs of the participants.

5. **Program Monitoring, Evaluation, and Improvement**
    a. The Court shall monitor adherence to best practice standards, evaluate outcomes, and implement data driven program adjustments when indicated.
    b. The Court shall report key performance indicator data as requested by the OCA.

DATA COLLECTION RECOMMENDATIONS

The categories presented below illustrate a selection of the identified best practice standards and categories as it pertains to data collection. Although not exhaustive, the following highlight the key recommendations:

1. **Pre-enrollment Collection**
    a. Participant demographic and case information
    b. Referral date and source
    c. Assessment date, type, and result
    d. Eligibility decision and rationale

2. **Post-enrollment Collection**
    a. Entry date
    b. Housing, employment, education, and family status at time of entry
    c. Diagnosis level
    d. Treatment type, date, duration, modality, and service adjustments made
    e. Phase progression
    f. Drug testing results
    g. Court review dates as well as incentives, sanctions, and service adjustments issued
    h. Completion date

3. **Post-separation collection**
    a. Rearrest information at 1-, 3-, and 5- years post-separation for criminal cases
    b. Subsequent DFPS compliant at the same intervals for civil cases.

ROADMAP FORWARD

By identifying the standards by which Texas specialty courts should operate and the key performance indicators that will be used to evaluate fidelity to those standards, the groundwork will be laid for determining requirements and ultimately inform the procurement process for a statewide case management system for specialty courts. Additionally, an accreditation process can be developed that will include assessments, evaluations, and peer reviews. Once these processes are established, the OCA will have the framework to enhance the current oversight of specialty court programs across the state in an efficient and cost-effective manner while meeting the needs of local communities, courts, and counties.