

## **Health and Wellness Court (HAWC): A Local Path to Mental Health and Stability**

Mental health treatment courts are specialized, collaborative programs that provide an alternative to incarceration for individuals living with mental health or co-occurring substance use disorders. In Mohave County, this approach brings together judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, and healthcare professionals to guide participants toward voluntary, community-based treatment. Through regular court appearances, structured supervision, and coordinated support services, the program aims to reduce repeat offenses while helping individuals build stable, healthier lives.

Health and Wellness Court (HAWC), a program of the Mohave County Superior Court (which relies on a diversion option offered by the Mohave County Attorney's Office), is dedicated to improving outcomes by addressing the underlying health needs that often contribute to involvement in the justice system. By focusing on treatment and rehabilitation rather than punishment alone, HAWC supports meaningful, long-term behavioral change while still protecting victim rights and public safety.

“Health and Wellness Court represents a shift in how we approach justice in our community,” said Judge Rick Williams, Presiding Treatment Court Judge. “By collaborating with our justice partners and community treatment providers, we can identify and address underlying mental and behavioral health issues that contributed to a participant’s arrest and incarceration, monitor their progress in treatment, and give the opportunity to earn a dismissal of their criminal charge. This balance of accountability and therapeutic support helps restore lives and strengthens public safety across Mohave County.”

The program serves Mohave County residents whose mental health or substance use challenges have played a role in their legal involvement. Participants are connected with individualized treatment plans and a range of local services designed to support overall well-being—including mental, physical, and social health.

“Through cooperative coordination of care with treatment providers, Health and Wellness Court serves as a vital bridge between accountability and recovery, helping individuals overcome behavioral health challenges while strengthening the well-being of our entire community.” Said Ambur Banas, Behavioral Health Professional and Substance Abuse Counselor with Southwest Behavioral Health.

HAWC serves individuals with a variety of mental health conditions, including serious mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, as well as other diagnosable

disorders. Some participants may also qualify under Arizona’s Title 36 provisions or have a Serious Mental Illness (SMI) designation.

Through partnerships with a network of approved providers across Mohave County, participants receive tailored care and access to critical resources. With participant consent, the court closely monitors progress to promote accountability, encourage continued engagement, and support successful, lasting outcomes.

“Health and Wellness Court reflects our commitment to a healthier, safer community,” said Diversion Specialist Don Bischoff. “By investing in treatment and support, we are creating opportunities for lasting change—for individuals, families, and Mohave County as a whole.”

The Health and Wellness Court continues to deliver transformative results in Mohave County, having successfully graduated more than 55 participants since its inception. Each graduate represents a significant step toward long-term recovery, stability, and reduced involvement in the justice system.

Today, the program’s impact remains strong, with over 40 individuals actively engaged in the court and participating in structured treatment, accountability measures, and supportive services designed to promote lasting change. Through this ongoing work, the Health and Wellness Court is strengthening individuals, families, and the broader community.