

CONTINUUM OF CARE & ASSISTED OUTPATIENT TREATMENT (AOT) MYTHS VS. FACTS

MYTH #1: AOT IS A BLANKET “FORCED TREATMENT” PROGRAM FOR ANYONE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS.

FACT: AOT is lifesaving treatment intervention – not “forced treatment”. AOT would apply to a narrow subset of those suffering with severe mental illness, who have a history of treatment non-adherence and repeat involuntary hospitalization and/or incarceration.

MYTH #2: AOT VIOLATES CIVIL LIBERTIES.

FACT: AOT laws in 48 states have been upheld as constitutional when due process and legal protections are in place. It provides lifesaving outpatient treatment with dignity and rights – not without them. Continuity of care helps end the revolving door of repeat hospitalizations, homelessness and incarceration.

MYTH #3: AOT MEANS MEDICATION WILL BE FORCED ON SOMEONE AGAINST THEIR WILL.

FACT: There is no such thing as forced medication in the community or through outpatient treatment. AOT promotes participation in care while preserving rights; involuntary medication laws apply only in inpatient hospital settings.

MYTH #4: AOT WILL LEAD TO MORE INCARCERATIONS OR INSTITUTIONALIZATIONS.

FACT: AOT is a civil court process, not criminal, so there is no means to incarcerate anyone. Data from multiple studies and programs across the country consistently shows AOT programs reduced hospitalizations, hospital visits, arrests, homelessness, victimization, and incarceration.

MYTH #5: AOT WILL BE APPLIED DISPROPORTIONATELY TO COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

FACT: Data from states like New York show no significant racial disparities in AOT participation when eligibility criteria are applied fairly. Equity safeguards remain essential.

MYTH #6: MORE VOLUNTARY SERVICES WOULD MAKE AOT UNNECESSARY.

FACT: Strong voluntary systems are vital, but some individuals with severe mental illness who lack awareness of illness (anosognosia) won't seek help voluntarily. AOT reaches this small, high-need group. Due to its robust healthcare system, Massachusetts is well suited to implement an AOT program successfully.