



# KIRK WATSON

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## REMAKING AUSTIN STATE HOSPITAL

The Austin State Hospital, parts of which date back to the 1850s, must be replaced. It's falling apart and isn't suited for providing behavioral health care in the 21st century.

### *Texas Brain Health Center*

To develop a vision for replacing ASH, I pulled together experts from UT's Dell Medical School, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, Integral Care and Central Health, among others. Our objective was to lay the groundwork for creating a brain health center of excellence — akin to MD Anderson for cancer care or the Cleveland Clinic for cardiac care — that will improve access to care for everyone in Central Texas, regardless of their ability to pay. We're calling it the Texas Brain Health Center.

A priority of mine in this legislative session was funding to help realize that vision. I'm pleased that the budget we passed made a \$300 million down payment toward overhauling our state psychiatric hospitals. I expect that some of that money will be used for planning the future of the Austin State Hospital on the current campus.

### *Health care, not crisis care*

Mental illness is common. Often hidden but common. One out five adults in Texas have experienced some form of mental illness. Brain health, in concept, is no different than heart health, and it should be integrated in the health care system for the rest of the body. Yet we deal with it differently — and poorly at that.

For most of us, what we have is a public system that mostly helps people in crisis, either in emergency rooms or jails — the most expensive and ineffective places to provide care. The result is less than half of people with psychiatric conditions receive effective treatment.

What we're missing is preventative care that helps day to day. Care necessary to keep folks out of crisis.

Our hope is that the Texas Brain Health Center will provide that full continuum of care and help to fill that gap in Central Texas.