

**TWC** | TULSA WOMEN'S  
COMMISSION

# **UNITS OF INQUIRY REPORT**

2024 - 2025

Presented To  
CITY OF TULSA

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## **Tulsa Women's Commission: Advancing Women's Opportunities in Tulsa**

### **Unit 1 Inquiry Summary (October 2024 - February 2025)**

From October 2024 through February 2025, the Tulsa Women's Commission has been actively investigating three critical areas affecting women in our community: economic security, technology training opportunities, and housing stability. These interconnected issues represent both significant challenges and promising pathways for women in Tulsa. Through research, community engagement, and collaboration with local organizations, the Commission has compiled valuable information to guide policy recommendations and support initiatives that empower women economically, professionally, and personally. This document summarizes our key findings and strategic opportunities in each focus area.

#### **Economic Security: Building Career Pathways in Technology**

Tulsa is positioning itself as an emerging technology hub through initiatives led by the Tulsa Innovation Labs (TIL), piloted by the George Kaiser Family Foundation. With projections to create 56,000 jobs by 2033 and capture \$1.6 billion of the global market in autonomous systems, these initiatives aim to ensure 20,000 of those positions are filled by women. Currently, women represent only 33% of the tech workforce.

The earnings potential in technology careers presents significant economic opportunities for women. Entry-level positions such as IT Technician (\$32,200-\$59,696) and IT Specialist (averaging \$71,270) provide solid foundations, while advanced roles in cybersecurity, data science, and cloud architecture offer six-figure salaries ranging from \$105,000 to over \$330,000 annually.

Several Tulsa-based employers are actively hiring in these fields, including:

- Data Science & AI: Data Annotation, Microsoft, ServiceNow
- Cybersecurity: AAON, QuikTrip, NSU, ONEOK, BOK Financial
- Cloud Computing: Lumen, Cherokee Federal, Family & Children's Services
- Engineering & Design: QuikTrip, Cox Communications, Google, Xperi, Zeeco

#### **Educational Opportunities: Technology Training**

Despite the opportunities in technology, women face significant barriers to entry and advancement. Less than 20% of leadership positions in technology are held by women,

and less than 30% of technology jobs overall. Half of women in tech report experiencing gender discrimination, and 50% leave the field by age 35. Women are also underrepresented in STEM education, comprising only 20-22% of computer science, engineering, and physics degrees.

Tulsa offers numerous education and training pathways to help women overcome these barriers:

Tulsa's educational institutions offer diverse technology programs, including TCC's 28+ tech programs and Cyber Skills Center, OU Polytechnic's degrees in AI and cybersecurity, and specialized programs at OSU, TU, and NSU. Non-degree options include Tulsa Tech's information technology programs and Atlas School's full-stack development curriculum.

To address specific barriers, the Commission has identified several areas requiring focused attention:

- Accessible training options that accommodate caregiving responsibilities
- Financial support for equipment, tuition, and living expenses during career transitions
- Mentorship programs that connect women with role models in the industry
- Professional networks that provide ongoing support and opportunities

### **Housing Stability: Foundations for Economic Mobility**

Housing stability represents a fundamental requirement for women's economic security and career advancement. Currently, Tulsa faces significant housing challenges that disproportionately affect women. The city needs 13,000 affordable housing units to meet current demand, with average rents of \$1,000/month requiring minimum wage earners to work 100 hours weekly to afford housing.

Housing instability and homelessness affect many Tulsa women, with 1,389 individuals experiencing homelessness according to the 2024 Point-in-Time count. Of particular concern for women are contributing factors like domestic violence (the second highest cause for women re-entering homelessness) and loss of income/benefits. Oklahoma's lack of tenant protection laws, including anti-retaliation provisions, makes addressing housing issues particularly challenging for vulnerable residents.

Strategic solutions being implemented include:

1. Housing Solutions/A Way Home for Tulsa (AWH4T) strategic plan focusing on preventing homelessness, transforming care systems, increasing housing access, and building community partnerships

2. The NACA (Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America) mortgage program, which offers character-based lending without credit score requirements, no down payments, and no closing costs
3. Advocacy for affordable housing development in all Tulsa neighborhoods
4. Tenant protection initiatives through policy change and educational programs

## **Conclusion**

The Tulsa Women's Commission recognizes that economic security, technology training, and housing stability are deeply interconnected issues affecting women's opportunities and wellbeing in our community. By focusing on developing technology career pathways, eliminating barriers to training and education, and ensuring access to stable, affordable housing, we can create a more equitable future for women in Tulsa. The Commission remains committed to advocating for policies and programs that address these critical areas and to working collaboratively with community partners to implement effective solutions. Through these combined efforts, we aim to empower women economically and socially, strengthening our entire community in the process.

## **Acknowledgments**

The Tulsa Women's Commission extends sincere appreciation to the following individuals for their valuable expertise and contributions during this inquiry term:

- Abisoye Ajayi, Tulsa Innovation Labs
- Commissioner Dezeray Edwards, Lumen
- Erin Velez, Housing Solutions Tulsa
- Amy Olsen, Housing Solutions Tulsa
- Commissioner Charisa Jacobs

## **Tulsa Women's Commission: Centering Mental Health, Healing, and Trauma Recovery Unit 2 Inquiry Summary (April - June 2025)**

From April through June 2025, the Tulsa Women's Commission focused its second inquiry term on the intersecting issues of mental health, trauma recovery, and personal safety. The Commission heard from subject matter experts, nonprofit leaders, and community advocates on the mental health challenges disproportionately affecting women in Tulsa. Key discussions explored trauma-informed care, human trafficking, intimate partner violence, reentry from incarceration, and culturally responsive supports.

This summary reflects insights gathered across three monthly sessions, and highlights the ongoing challenges and strategic opportunities for supporting women's recovery and mental wellness in Tulsa.

### **Understanding Trauma and Mental Health Needs**

Experts shared that trauma often begins early and can take many forms, including acute, chronic, and complex trauma. These experiences often compound over time and are closely linked with long-term physical and mental health outcomes.

#### **Key findings include:**

- Oklahoma continues to rank among the top states for domestic violence-related deaths. Most fatal cases involve individuals who never accessed services (Family Safety Center, 2025)
- Women who seek help through agencies like the Family Safety Center often experience multiple forms of violence, including domestic abuse, sexual assault, and stalking.
- High Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scores remain prevalent in Oklahoma and are linked to poor outcomes in health, education, and employment (Resonance, 2025).
- Economic hardship, lack of access to care, and stigma continue to prevent many women from receiving the mental health support they need.

### **Polyvictimization and its Impact**

Commissioners examined the effects of **polyvictimization**, where individuals experience multiple types of trauma—such as domestic violence, sexual assault, neglect, financial abuse, and discrimination—often across their lifespan.

Data shared by Family Safety Center indicates:

- **87%** of adult women served by FSC reported emotional abuse

- Over **62%** experienced strangulation or positional asphyxia
- Nearly **50%** reported histories of stalking, financial abuse, or chronic poverty
- Mental health symptoms were widespread:
  - **87%** reported anxiety
  - **83%** reported sadness
  - **77%** reported sleep disturbances
  - Over **60%** reported attention and concentration issues
  - Nearly **50%** reported suicidal ideation or self-harm

These findings affirm that mental health interventions must be trauma-informed, long-term, and coordinated across systems.

### **Human Trafficking and Exploitation**

Presenters highlighted the growing prevalence of human trafficking, particularly among vulnerable youth. Rather than abduction, many victims are groomed and manipulated over time by people they trust, including family members and romantic partners.

Key insights:

- Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are now the most common recruitment tools used by traffickers.
- Trafficking often intersects with housing instability, poverty, and previous trauma. Victims are frequently isolated from their support systems and coerced into silence through psychological control, threats, and shame.
- There is a growing need for coordinated, trauma-informed responses that recognize trafficking as both a public health and public safety issue.

### **Pathways to Recovery and Stability**

Speakers with expertise in reentry services and community mental health emphasized that trauma recovery requires a whole-person approach, including access to safe housing, stable employment, and long-term mental health care.

Highlighted programs and strategies include:

- Culturally responsive mental health support, including the CRAC (Culture Responsive Access to Care) program and the Community Engaged Genealogy Project (City of Tulsa, 2025)
- Trauma-informed housing and employment programs for formerly incarcerated women, such as Take Two Café at Resonance Center for Women.
- Increased access to mobile crisis response teams, peer recovery services, and community-based support networks.

- Strengthening pathways for diverse representation in the mental health workforce to improve trust and care access for underserved populations.

## Strategic Opportunities

The Commission identified several key opportunities to improve systems of care and support for women in Tulsa:

1. Expand **trauma-informed training** for educators, law enforcement, healthcare providers, and service agencies.
2. Increase access to safe, affordable, and recovery-centered **housing options**.
3. Provide school- and community-based **education on digital safety and exploitation prevention**.
4. Invest in community health workers and **culturally competent providers** to reach diverse populations.
5. Support **survivor-led programming and mentorship models**, especially for women exiting the justice system.

## Conclusion

Mental health and trauma recovery are essential to women's long-term wellbeing, economic opportunity, and safety. This inquiry term elevated the urgent need for coordinated, responsive services that meet women where they are and support their healing journeys. The Commission remains committed to identifying system gaps, promoting cross-sector collaboration, and advocating for policies and programs that prioritize the mental health and safety of women in Tulsa.

## Acknowledgments

The Tulsa Women's Commission would like to thank the following individuals for generously sharing their time, insights, and expertise on Mental Health, Healing, and Trauma Recovery during this inquiry term:

- Suzann Stewart, Family Safety Center
- Dr. Rebecca Hubbard, City of Tulsa
- Melissa Hoover, Resonance Center for Women
- Commissioner Deidra Kirtley
- AnnMarie Hayden
- Commissioner Premadonna Braddick

## **Tulsa Women's Commission: Advancing Safety, Healthcare Access, and Empowerment Unit 3 Inquiry Summary (September – November 2025)**

From September through November 2025, the Tulsa Women's Commission focused its third unit of inquiry on the interconnected themes of women's safety, healthcare access, and empowerment. Across this inquiry period, commissioners engaged with subject matter experts, community leaders, and one another to explore systemic barriers, personal and collective safety considerations, gaps in women's healthcare, and the social, cultural, and economic factors that shape women's empowerment in Tulsa.

This document synthesizes insights from monthly meetings, guest presentations, and commissioner discussions. It builds on our earlier Units of Inquiry and continues the Commission's commitment to identifying system gaps, elevating community perspectives, and informing policy recommendations for the Mayor and City leaders.

### **Women's Safety in Tulsa: Understanding Risks and Strengthening Prevention**

In September, Commissioner of Public Safety Laurel Roberts provided a comprehensive overview of safety issues affecting women in Tulsa. Her remarks and commissioner dialogue illuminated both significant challenges and emerging opportunities within public safety systems.

#### **Key Themes and Findings:**

##### ***1. Representation and culture within public safety institutions***

- Tulsa's "30 by 30" Initiative seeks to ensure that 30% of TPD's officers are women by 2030. Women currently represent approximately 15–17% of the force, with growing representation in recent graduating classes.
- Cultural barriers remain, including lack of family-friendly policies, inconsistent access to appropriate equipment and uniforms for women, and limited affinity spaces.

##### ***2. Safety risks for women in public spaces***

- Safety concerns persist across trails, parking garages, and isolated areas.
- Commissioner Roberts emphasized the importance of situational awareness, personal boundary-setting, social network support, and self-defense planning as core components of women's personal safety.

##### ***3. Addressing male violence and prevention***

- Commissioners raised questions about how men are being engaged in violence-prevention initiatives.
- Commissioner Roberts noted the absence of government-supported messaging or educational programs directly focused on preventing male-perpetrated violence before it occurs.

##### ***4. Intersection with housing and human trafficking***

- The City's multi-disciplinary, trauma-centered approach to human trafficking is shifting practice toward supporting victims rather than punitive responses. Housing instability following domestic violence or relationship dissolution remains a significant driver of homelessness for women, underscoring the need for tailored housing interventions.



### *Commission Reflections*

Commissioners highlighted opportunities to educate diverse audiences, raise awareness, and serve as advisors to the Mayor. They also emphasized the importance of creating concise, accessible talking points for community presentations.

### **Women's Healthcare Access: Barriers, Innovations, and Policy Realities**

In October, the Commission heard presentations from Community Health Connection (CHC) CEO and Commission Vice Chair Kate Neary, and from Heather Palacios, Vice President, Philanthropy & Community Partnerships for Planned Parenthood Great Plains. Together, they provided a detailed overview of the healthcare landscape for women in Tulsa, including access challenges for underserved communities, reproductive healthcare restrictions, and pressures facing providers.

#### Primary Care and Community Health Access

##### *Community Health Centers*

- CHC is one of two federally qualified community health centers in Tulsa, serving over 17,000 unique patients annually, more than 40% of whom are uninsured.
- CHC provides integrated services including primary care, obstetrics, pediatrics, dental, pharmacy, and transportation, helping reduce barriers for women and families.
- Approximately 60% of patients are women, and nearly 80% speak Spanish. CHC's bilingual staff strengthens trust and care quality for immigrant communities.

##### *Title X Funding and Reproductive Health*

- CHC has been a Title X grantee for a decade, providing reproductive and family planning services to low-income, uninsured, and underinsured patients.
  - Demand for Title X services increased by 40% from 2024–2025.
- Commissioners expressed concern about federal attempts to restrict Title X funding.

#### Planned Parenthood Great Plains: Realities in a Post-Roe Landscape

##### *Clinical and policy challenges*

- In Oklahoma, PPGP provides comprehensive reproductive and primary care but cannot provide abortion services.
- Patients increasingly seek follow-up care after self-managed abortions due to bans on medication and procedural abortion.
- Physicians face legal risks when treating fetal anomalies or non-viable pregnancies, contributing to delayed or denied care.

##### *Access, equity, and social realities*

- Oklahoma is tied for the highest uninsured rate in the nation.
- 44% of Tulsa PPGP patients earn below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- Commissioners discussed the emotional and social costs of eroding reproductive rights and the implications for women's autonomy, family planning, and long-term economic stability.

### **Empowerment: Personal Agency, Structural Barriers, and Collective Action**

In November, Commissioner and OU professor Dr. Meg Myers Morgan delivered a culminating presentation on empowerment, synthesizing themes from all three inquiry units: economic security, mental health and trauma recovery, and safety and healthcare access.

## Understanding Women's Power Across Three Domains

Dr. Morgan framed empowerment through three interconnected spheres:

1. Self (personal safety, health, education, relationships, and self-worth)
2. Career (workplace safety, opportunity access, inclusion, compensation, and childcare)
3. Society (public safety, stereotypes, beauty standards, representation, and reproductive rights)

### Key Insights

#### *Personal Safety as a Prerequisite for Empowerment*

Across environments—home, workplace, and community—women's lack of safety undermines their agency and autonomy. Safety emerged as a throughline across all three inquiry units.

#### *Healthcare Biases and Representation Gaps*

- Women's health research remains insufficient; menstrual products were not tested using blood until 2023.
- Black women face significantly higher risks in pregnancy and childbirth.
- Representation in medical, educational, and professional leadership settings shapes women's confidence and access to culturally competent care.

#### *Workplace Dynamics, Inclusion, and Economic Power*

- 40% of women report workplace sexual harassment.
- Gender-based valuation of labor depresses wages as women enter certain fields (e.g., veterinary medicine, biology).
- Social media influencing is a female-dominated but undervalued profession, with male influencers earning significantly more.

#### *Childcare as Economic Infrastructure*

- Childcare shortages disproportionately impact women's ability to maintain employment.
- COVID-19 recovery took women nearly a year longer than men due to childcare barriers.

#### *Societal Expectations and Financial Costs*

- Gender stereotypes, domestic labor expectations, beauty standards, and the "pink tax" contribute to financial inequity and psychological strain.
- Across meeting discussions, commissioners expressed personal resonance with these pressures.

### Strategies for Advancing Empowerment

Dr. Morgan proposed three actionable strategies:

1. Choose One Area to Go "All In" On- Focused action is more effective and sustainable than diffuse advocacy.
2. Stay Safe and Be a Safe Space- Actively communicate safety, model it, and support those who seek help.
3. Prioritize Practical Action Over Ideology- Move beyond the "principle of the thing" toward data-driven, solution-oriented advocacy (e.g., negotiating pay through market research)

rather than principle alone).

### **Commission Reflections and Opportunities for Action**

Across the three inquiry months, commissioners consistently emphasized:

- The power of survivor-led approaches in shaping policy and programs.
- The importance of cross-sector collaboration with city departments, nonprofits, healthcare networks, and educational institutions.
- The need for public-facing communication, including talking points, presentations, and messaging that elevate women's issues across Tulsa.
- The opportunity to identify one or more signature initiatives for deeper focus following the completion of all three inquiry units.
- The value of continuing to ensure meetings remain accessible, representative, and responsive to the realities facing diverse women in Tulsa.

### **Conclusion**

The third unit of inquiry highlights the profound intersections between women's safety, healthcare access, and empowerment. These themes reinforce and deepen the findings from the first two inquiry units: women's economic security, mental wellness, physical safety, and personal agency are deeply interdependent.

### **Acknowledgments**

The Tulsa Women's Commission would like to thank the following individuals for generously sharing their time, insights, and expertise on women's safety, healthcare access, and empowerment during this inquiry term: Commissioner of Public Safety **Laurel Roberts**, City of Tulsa, **Kate Neary**, Community Health Connection, **Heather Palacios**, Planned Parenthood Great Plains, Commissioner **Meg Myers Morgan**, University of Oklahoma