

Kentucky Mental Health & Disability Records

Institution Records:	
Central State Hospital	1873-1970
Eastern State Hospital	1824-1971
Frankfort State Hospital	1860-1950s
Kentucky State Hospital-Danville	1946-1977
Auditor's Office Records: *varies by institution	
Official Correspondence	1845-1879
Financial Vouchers	1851-1900
Patient Ledgers	1820-1923
Pauper Lists by County	1868-1872
Financial Reports	1861-1881
Financial Account Books	1865-1872
Financial Correspondence	1878-1888

County & Circuit Records: *varies by county	
Original Lunacy Inquests, Books, & Bonds	~1830s-1960s (+/- 10 years)
Microfilmed Lunacy Inquests, Books, & Bonds	1881-1969
Dept for Behavioral Health: <i>Records Officer Contact:</i> Matt Hall (502) 229-6957, matt.hall@ky.gov	

Background

Timeline of Mental Health and Disability Care in Kentucky

Early 1800s:

- Individuals with mental illnesses and people with disabilities were primarily cared for by families or confined in local jails, poorhouses, or almshouses.
- These early arrangements provided little medical treatment and often exposed residents to harsh, unsafe conditions.

1822–1824:

- 1822: Kentucky General Assembly passed legislation to establish a state lunatic asylum.
- 1824: **Eastern State Hospital** in Lexington opened as the first state-supported institution for mental health care.
- Admissions included people with a range of mental health conditions and disabilities.

1860:

- **Frankfort State Hospital and School** was established to serve the northern region of the state and provide care for individuals with mental illnesses and disabilities.

1869:

- **Central State Hospital** in Louisville opened, expanding state-supported care across the Commonwealth.

1873–1880s:

- 1873: **Kentucky State Hospital** in Danville began operations to serve central Kentucky.

- Each institution, maintained records including patient ledgers, financial vouchers, official correspondence, and medical reports.

Late 19th – Early 20th Century:

- County lunacy inquest books documented legal proceedings for individuals deemed mentally ill or unable to care for themselves.
- Inquests determined competency, guardianship, and institutionalization, forming the legal oversight system for mental health care.
- Hospital records provide insight into daily life, treatment practices, and administrative operations.

Mid-20th Century:

- 1950s–1960s: Shift from long-term institutionalization toward community-based treatment and outpatient services.
- Advances in psychiatric medicine, changing social attitudes, and federal and state legislation—including the **Community Mental Health Act of 1963**—promoted deinstitutionalization and community programs.

Present Day:

- Kentucky continues to operate state hospitals, regional mental health centers, and community-based programs.
- Historical records at KDLA document policies, practices, and personal stories of patients with mental illness and disabilities.
- Some records, such as patient ledgers, are **restricted under KRS 210.175 and 210.185** to protect patient privacy.

Access

Researchers at the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA) can access a range of mental health and disability records, though access depends on the type of record. **Unrestricted records**, such as financial vouchers, official correspondence, and county lunacy inquest books, are available to the public for research and may be viewed in the archives' research room. **Restricted records**, including patient ledgers and certain detailed medical files, are protected under **KRS 210.175 and 210.185** to safeguard patient privacy and confidentiality; access to these materials requires special permission or a court order.

For remote access or to place an order for records from this collection, please visit kdla.ky.gov. For any questions about accessing these records, you may also call the KDLA research room at (502) 564-1770.

Other Sources

Consider any of the following resources for more information when researching Mental Health & Disability Records in Kentucky.

- **Kentucky Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID):** Records from state mental health and developmental facilities, including Eastern State Hospital and other behavioral health institutions. Website: <https://dbhdid.ky.gov>. Records Officer: Matt Hall, (502) 229-6957, matt.hall@ky.gov.
- **Kentucky Historic Institutions:** Provides access to historic records from Kentucky institutions, including school, hospital, and institutional records. Website: <https://kyhi.org/>.