



Increase Access to Mental Health Services

Background

WSHA supports a comprehensive behavioral health plan. In particular, WSHA is working on policy areas that can improve the behavioral health system including:

Long-term mental health care in the community. Concentrating all long-term mental health placements at Eastern and Western State Hospitals is not working. Some general-acute care and freestanding psychiatric community hospitals are interested in providing long-term, court-ordered mental health services, but we need to change state law to allow it.

Certificate of Need for psychiatric beds. The current Certificate of Need (CN) exemption for psychiatric beds expires on June 30, 2019. This exemption allows hospitals licensed under 70.41 RCW to be exempt from CN requirements for the addition of new psychiatric beds and allow freestanding psychiatric hospitals licensed under 71.12 RCW to be exempt from CN requirements for a one-time addition of 30 beds if they serve the safety-net population.

WSHA Position

Our patients and families need more mental health services closer to home. WSHA has identified policy areas where changes in law would create more mental health treatment capacity so that hospitals/health systems and other providers could do more to serve people with mental health needs. We support legislation to:

- Direct the state to contract with community hospitals to provide long-term care and treatment for mental health services in communities across the state for 90- and 180-day commitment orders; and
- Continue to exempt licensed hospitals for two years from the arduous CN process for psychiatric beds.

Key Messages

Long-term mental health in the community

- Patients on long-term civil commitment orders will be better served not in state hospitals, but when they are closer to their home, communities, and families. They may be less likely to be readmitted for care and have shorter durations of stay. Washington hospitals stand ready to help the state address the growing demand for long-term civil commitment services.
- Legislation would help expand the state's inpatient psychiatric capacity by permitting acute care and freestanding psychiatric hospitals to serve patients on 90- and 180-day civil commitment orders. Currently, there are four acute care hospitals in Pierce, Snohomish, and Yakima counties willing to provide 35 long-term involuntary commitment psychiatric beds and three psychiatric hospitals in King County that can provide 46 more beds to help expand the state's mental health capacity in the community.

Certificate of Need for psychiatric beds

- The legislature has twice allowed licensed hospitals to be exempted from CN requirements for new beds, but those provisions will expire on June 30, 2019. Legislation would extend that exemption for two more years.
- At least six beds dedicated to patients on 90- and 180-day involuntary commitment orders would be added to the state's capacity if the legislature extends the CN exemption. Other beds that could be added include 30 short-term psychiatric beds.

Contact Information
