



Extend the Certificate of Need Exemption to Increase Inpatient Psychiatric Bed Capacity

Background

Psychiatric patients are better served when they are closer to their homes, communities, and families. When they are closer to their support network, it can ease their transition to outpatient care and reduce their likelihood of being readmitted to the hospital. To help hospitals provide community psychiatric beds (both short- and long-term beds), the Legislature allows hospitals to be temporarily exempt from a full Certificate of Need (CN) review when either converting existing medical-surgical or rehabilitation beds to psychiatric beds or adding new psychiatric beds.

This CN exemption allows acute care hospitals to add an unlimited number of short- and long-term psychiatric beds and freestanding psychiatric hospitals to add up to 30 short- or long-term beds. This exemption expires on June 30, 2021. Since 2014, community hospitals across the state have used this temporary exemption to add numerous short- and long-term psychiatric beds. In fact, as Washington State moves forward on its 5-year plan to move long-term civil commitment patients out of Eastern and Western State Hospitals, community hospitals will need to rely on this temporary exemption to ensure there are sufficient long-term civil commitment beds in communities across the state.

WSHA Position

WSHA strongly supports extending the CN exemption for four years – through June 30, 2025. To complement hospital efforts to increase bed capacity for 90- and 180-day civil commitment patients, WSHA also supports amending the exemption for freestanding psychiatric hospitals. The exemption will allow freestanding psychiatric hospitals: (1) the one-time ability to add up to 30 beds for 90- and 180-day civil commitment patients; and (2) the one-time ability to add up to 30 beds for all other types of psychiatric patients. Both changes will allow willing hospitals to increase psychiatric bed capacity quickly and efficiently.

Key Messages

- Over the years, the legislature has recognized that the cumbersome CN process is a key barrier in adding mental health bed capacity. In 2014, the legislature allowed hospitals converting medical-surgical or rehabilitation beds into psychiatric beds or hospitals adding new psychiatric beds to be temporarily exempt from a full CN review. Hospitals have used this CN exemption to add numerous short- and long-term psychiatric beds.
- The legislature has extended the exemption three times, and the current exemption expires on June 30, 2021. Extending this exemption for four more years will significantly help increase psychiatric bed capacity.
- Revising the limitation for freestanding psychiatric hospitals – to now allow them the one-time ability to add up to 30 beds for 90- and 180-day civil commitment patients and the one-time ability to add up to 30 beds for all other types of psychiatric patients – will be a step in the Governor’s mental health plan.

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