



2017
ISSUE BRIEF

**HB 2107, SB 5434, and HB 1547/SB 5446:
Mental health system capacity**

Increase Access to Mental Health Services

Our patients and families need more mental health services closer to home. WSHA has identified two 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.

Long-term mental health care in community hospitals (HB 2107 and SB 5434)

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.

Patients could be better served when closer to their home, communities, and families. Patients can transition out of care when close to home; and with community supports, will be less likely to be readmitted to care. Community hospitals are likely to have shorter lengths of stay for patients, as long as there are resources provided for community living once the patient no longer needs to be committed. Legislation should be enacted directing the Department of Social and Health Services to contract for long-term mental health services with community hospitals.

Certificate of Need for psychiatric beds (HB 1547/SB 5446)

While some new inpatient psychiatric services are beginning to open, the state's Certificate of Need (CN) law continues to slow down the expansion of psychiatric services. The boarding of mental health patients in emergency departments is a major problem with the number of single bed certifications reaching all-time highs.



The legislature can take concrete steps to increase capacity for inpatient mental health care.

The legislature has twice allowed licensed hospitals to be exempted from CN for new beds, but those provisions have expired. WSHA supports continuing to exempt psychiatric beds from CN in currently licensed hospitals when certain conditions are met. This will allow hospitals that want to expand services to do so more quickly and efficiently.

WSHA position

WSHA supports directing the state to contract with community hospitals to provide long-term care and treatment for mental health patients in communities around the state.

WSHA also supports exempting licensed hospitals from going through a long CN process for badly needed psychiatric beds. These policies will help create more options for patients in need and are part of a broader solution for long-term mental health care.