

January 26, 2021

Dear Chair Fischer and Members of the House Behavioral Health Policy Division,

First, thank you for discussion of Minnesota's mental health inpatient bed capacity, which is a significant and ongoing concern in our communities. There are not enough available inpatient psychiatric beds in our state, which leads to emergency room boarding, traveling long distances to access a hospital bed, and even out-of-state placements.

It is, of course, always our hope and preference that people living with mental illness are able to receive community-based treatment. We also appreciate the work that has occurred in recent years to build out crisis services and IRTS facilities to help ensure that people who do not need a hospital level of care are able to get what they need without inpatient care, and strongly believe that our state should continue to build out these services. However, this work does not eradicate the continued need for access to mental health inpatient beds.

A lack of access to inpatient care often means that people wait in emergency rooms for hours, even many days at a time, as they wait for the inpatient care that they need. Those who are able to access inpatient care often have to travel significant distances to do so, taking them far away from any support system they may have (and need) for recovery. This is not only an inadequate approach to health care, it is an unacceptable one that would never be tolerated in other areas of acute health need.

This situation is at risk of becoming a full-blown crisis. The M Health Fairview Hospital System has recently closed the emergency department at St. Joseph's Hospital, and has only guaranteed continued offering of its 100+ mental health and substance use disorder beds through the end of 2021. If those beds are closed, other health systems will not be able to absorb additional patients.

Minnesota already struggles with providing access to inpatient psychiatric beds, and further loss would be catastrophic for Minnesota's mental health system. Our mental health system needs to be built out, and while hospital beds are certainly not the only solution, they do play a critical role in ensuring access to mental health care for those with the most acute needs in our state.

We look forward to continued conversation on this issue with members of the Behavioral Health Policy Division as we all work together to find solutions to this critical issue. Thank you for your work.

Sincerely,



Shannah C. Mulvihill, MA, CFRE  
Executive Director