



January 23, 2024

Rep. Peter Fischer  
State Office Building Room 5  
100 Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Fischer and Committee Members:

Hennepin Healthcare is Minnesota's largest emergency department and busiest trauma center caring for Minnesotans across the state. We have proudly served Minnesotans in need of critical mental health and recovery services for decades and have been actively working to expand local capacity to serve both adults and children living with serious mental illness. I write in support of investing in mental health services by increasing Medicaid outpatient community based mental health rates. Facilitating access to community-based mental health services and supports is critical to prevent hospitalizations, civil commitments, homelessness, and the overrepresentation of people with serious mental illness in the criminal justice system.

Our emergency department (ED) is experiencing increasing numbers of people in need of immediate treatment for mental health, behavioral health, and substance abuse disorder needs. Patients "boarding" in our health system make up the majority of our pediatric mental health and substance use admissions with 113 admissions in 2023. Boarding is defined as being in the hospital without a medical or surgical need (which would require acute hospital-based care). Consequently, the unnecessary utilization of beds and staff, due to delays in discharge from our facility to an appropriate level of care, results in loss of bed availability needed for trauma patients from around the state.

These patients could have been cared for more appropriately in a system better supported by services designed to specifically address their complex care needs such as long-term, stable support through community and residential mental health, or substance use disorder services. Hospitals are not a place for people to live. In fact, unnecessary hospital stays can lead to irreversible decline in functional status and negatively impact psychological well-being, especially for older adults and children.

Please invest in mental health services by increasing Medicaid outpatient community based mental health rates that reimburse for the cost of care. Currently, Medicaid rates for these services are below the cost of providing care. There is consistently a greater number of Medicaid patients in our Adult Psychiatric Services than system wide—68% of our inpatient mental health patients are on Medicaid.

Investing in mental health to provide appropriate care, early intervention, and prevention services will help Minnesotans heal and prevent crises.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eduardo Navarro Colon', written in a cursive style.

Eduardo Navarro Colon, MD  
Chair, Adult Psychiatry Clinic  
Hennepin Healthcare System