



Jan. 26, 2021

Rep. Peter Fisher, Chair  
Behavioral Health Policy Division

Dear Behavioral Health Division Members,

On behalf of the Minnesota Medical Association (MMA) and its more than 10,000 member physicians, residents, and medical students, I am pleased to provide this letter regarding inpatient psychiatric bed capacity.

Late in 2019, the MMA and the Minnesota Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians convened a task force to recommend solutions to the persistent and worrisome boarding of mental health patients in emergency departments. The task force focused on the state's inpatient psychiatric bed capacity, availability of crisis and urgent mental health services, community supports, as well as mental health prevention efforts.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to pause this work after only a few meetings. There was strong agreement, however, that current system capacities fail to ensure that Minnesotans can access timely and effective mental health care in the setting that is most appropriate. This includes inpatient services, outpatient services, and other community-based support.

Minnesota's physicians are concerned about any loss of inpatient psychiatric beds because they are a critical resource to care for those whose conditions require hospitalization. If St. Joseph's Hospital in St. Paul closes and/or its existing psychiatric beds are not relocated or replaced, we worry this loss could significantly impact mental health service capacity not only in the metro area, but across the state. A shortage of inpatient psychiatric beds creates a cascade of problems for patients and their families as well as for physicians and other mental health providers. A patient experiencing a mental health emergency requires a calm environment to stabilize. Emergency departments, which are often noisy and chaotic, are neither a therapeutic nor a cost-effective environment for anyone in crisis. It is not uncommon for patients with mental health crises to spend several days or longer in an emergency department waiting for an available

psychiatric bed. A shortage of inpatient psychiatric beds also puts a tremendous strain on families and caregivers, particularly when the only available bed is in a facility far from home.

As you consider the question of inpatient psychiatric bed capacity in Minnesota, I urge you to also think about the strategies needed to strengthen the whole of Minnesota's mental health continuum of care and to ensure its financial sustainability. We need the systems and supports in place to reduce the need for emergency services and inpatient care.

On behalf of the MMA, I am grateful for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marilyn J. Peitso MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marilyn Peitso, MD

President

Minnesota Medical Association