



TEXAS HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

June 16, 2016

Re: Senate Health and Human Services Committee Interim Charge on State's Ongoing Need for Inpatient Psychiatric Beds

Dear Chairman Schwertner and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony on the ongoing need for inpatient psychiatric beds in Texas. The Texas Hospital Association is a nonprofit trade association representing almost 500 Texas hospitals and health care systems to support their efforts to provide quality, cost-effective and accessible care to all Texans.

Texas hospitals strongly support policies and funding that increase the availability of state-funded inpatient psychiatric care and outpatient behavioral health care services as well as expanded access to behavioral health providers.

Texas hospitals often are the first place patients present when experiencing a mental health crisis. Under the federal Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA), hospitals are required to screen and stabilize patients with emergency conditions, regardless of the patient's ability to pay or the hospital's ability to provide the appropriate level of care. For hospitals treating patients experiencing a behavioral health crisis, one of the biggest barriers to effective and timely care is the lack of available state-funded psychiatric beds.

Most general acute-care hospitals cannot provide the necessary level of care for acute behavioral health patients, unless psychiatric beds are available onsite. In the absence of such beds, the hospital must find another facility with an open psychiatric bed, either in the community or one of the state hospitals, to which it can transfer the patient.

The lack of these beds is costly for both the patient and the facility. More importantly, it delays the receipt of needed care. In addition, for the hospital, it creates an inappropriate use of physical-care resources and delays in care for others seeking services in the emergency room.

Compounding the problem of the lack of beds is the growing number of forensic commitments at state hospitals and the length of stay associated with forensic commitments. The average length of stay for forensic patients is 89 days, more than double the length of stay for civil commitments.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the lack of inpatient psychiatric beds, the insufficient number of behavioral health care providers creates access-to-care challenges for hospitals seeking to find appropriate and

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<sup>1</sup> Behavioral Health Strategic Plan, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, 2016

timely care for their patients. The state's psychiatrist shortage is well documented, which creates long wait times for patients requiring psychiatry services. In addition, hospitals have to compete with both other hospitals and non-acute care settings to recruit physicians properly trained and qualified to stabilize patients in the emergency room.

THA applauds efforts the legislature has taken in previous legislative sessions to address these problems, particularly the additional state-funded hospital beds approved during the 84<sup>th</sup> session. Unfortunately, feedback from our membership indicates that more needs to be done, particularly to address the shortage of state-funded psychiatric beds, especially for non-forensic, civil commitments.

Texas hospitals remain committed to providing the best possible care for all patients. If we can provide any additional information or be of assistance in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.

**For more information, contact:**



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