Hospitals with Emergency Departments

Patients with a Behavioral Health Diagnosis in Emergency Departments

California has approximately 440 community hospitals. Of these, 335 currently have emergency departments (ED). Of those with EDs, 83 are in rural counties and 252 are in urban areas. These EDs experience 12 million patient encounter visits annually. One million of these visits are attributed to patients with behavioral health diagnoses.

The vast majority (65%) of emergency department visits for individuals with a behavioral health diagnosis do NOT result in an inpatient admission. Between 2006 and 2011, this type of ED visit increased from 57% to 65%. The percentage of behavioral health visits that do result in admission, for the same time period, declined from 43% to 35%.

Cost Impact to Emergency Departments

We received an estimate from a Southern California hospital that the average cost of a BH patient in their ED that did not result in an admission for behavioral health reasons was $3,481. Applying that cost to all the non-admit behavioral health ED visits, we see an increase year over year, nearly $2.5 billion in 2011. The cost impact for all behavioral health visits (admitted and not admitted) in 2011 exceeded $3.7 billion.