

Turning the Tide on Mental Illness & Substance Use Disorders

The Issue

California's behavioral health crisis has pushed our health care system to the breaking point. An estimated 10 million people in California - one in four adults - experiences a mental health disorder in any given year. Despite this, only one-third of adults who experience mental illness are getting treatment.

Hospitals see this every day in their emergency departments. **Behavioral health demands on the state's EDs are outpacing overall growth.** During a five-year period, this has resulted in a staggering 47 percent spike in ED patients with behavioral health conditions.

The doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers and other staff at hospitals know firsthand the challenges people with behavioral health conditions face. And they are committed to the challenges in getting these patients the treatment they need and deserve.

Many hospitals employ advanced screening techniques, collaborate with community-based providers and invest in specialized staff to treat patients with behavioral health conditions.

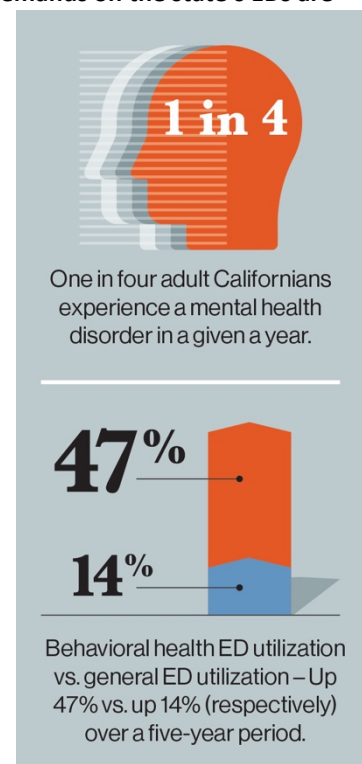
But more needs to be done. This crisis comes after decades of inaction and a lack of accountability for billions of behavioral health tax dollars. Moreover, there is no core set of mental health and substance abuse services for the state's 58 counties and behavioral health care reimburses at a significantly lower rate, discouraging providers from growing their capacity. **In the past 20 years, the number of inpatient psychiatric beds in California has decreased by nearly a third.**

Hospitals tirelessly provide emergency care to thousands of people with behavioral health condition, but while EDs are a safety net, they should be the option of last resort for chronic illnesses like mental health and substance use disorders.

What's Needed

There is no "magic bullet" for this problem, but momentum for effective, serious policy solutions seems to be growing. Gov. Gavin Newsom has indicated his desire to lead on this issue, and California's hospitals have joined with NAMI California on a statewide campaign to destigmatize behavioral health conditions.

If past is prologue, minor "fixes" to this issue will fail to address the root problem. They often result in more fragmentation, increased costs and additional frustration. **California's county-by-county system of behavioral health care needs reform to include a standardized set of core services.** Additional solutions could include payment reform, resource reallocation, more outpatient and community-based services, and a bolstered behavioral health workforce.



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