

There Exists a Severe Shortage of Treatment Options for Mental Health Patients

Millions of Americans are affected by mental illness. In a given year, one in five American adults experience mental illness, and 17 percent of youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health condition.

However, 56 percent of adults dealing with mental illness do not receive any mental health treatment. Among youth with severe depression, only 27 percent received consistent treatment. In addition, more than 11 million Americans have a severe mental health condition, yet 40 percent of adults with a serious mental health condition report they are not receiving any treatment.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the demand for mental health care. A 2021 Kaiser Family Foundation study found that 40 percent of adults in the U.S. reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, up from about 10 percent from January to June 2019, before the pandemic.

In June 2021, a CDC report found a 39 percent increase in visits to emergency departments for suspected suicide attempts among youth aged 12-17 during February-March 2021 as compared to the same period in 2019. Among girls within that age range, the increase was 51 percent.

The Mental Health Crisis is Leading to Boarding and Overcrowding in Emergency Departments

Despite these grim statistics, access to mental health treatment is severely lacking. As a result, behavioral health patients often turn to emergency departments for care. These patients are often boarded in the ED because of a shortage of inpatient beds and other treatment options. ENA research shows that the average ED stay for mental health patients is 18 hours versus 4 hours for all other types of patients.

privacy, increases the risk of medical errors, delays appropriate care and leads to worse outcomes.

The Improving Mental Health Access from the Emergency Department Act will Increase the Availability of Treatment for Mental Health Patients

As emergency departments across the country face this reality, some are implementing innovative solutions to ensure patients with mental illness receive the care they need and deserve. The Improving Mental Health Access from the Emergency Department Act would provide resources for EDs to adopt more collaborative and connected care models to better connect patients with appropriate resources in their communities. The legislation recognizes that needs vary by patient, provider and community and allows EDs to design the solutions that will work best for them.

The Improving Mental Health Access from the Emergency Department Act would:

- Authorize a competitive grant program for EDs to ensure prompt access to appropriate follow-up care for individuals experiencing acute mental health episodes.

Such innovative approaches could include:

- Expediting transition to post-emergency care through expanded coordination with regional service providers, bed availability tracking and management, transfer protocol development and transportation services
- Increasing the supply of inpatient psychiatric beds and alternative care settings such as regional emergency psychiatric units
- Expanding approaches to providing psychiatric care in the ED, including tele-psychiatric support, peak period crisis clinics or creating dedicated psychiatric emergency service units

The boarding and overcrowding situation in hospital emergency departments is reaching a crisis point. Improving coordination of care and providing follow-up treatment options for mental health patients who are in EDs are crucial elements in addressing this issue. Passage of the Improving Mental Health Access from the Emergency Department Act will help these patients to receive the care they need.

House Request: Cosponsor and Support the Improving Mental Health Access from the Emergency Department Act (H.R. 5414). *This bill was introduced by Rep. Raul Ruiz, D-Calif., on September 12, 2023 and referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee for further action.*

Senate Request: Cosponsor and Support the Improving Mental Health Access from the Emergency Department Act (S. 1346). *This bill was introduced by Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., on April 27, 2023, and referred to the Senate HELP Committee for further action.*

Research shows that the **average ED stay** for **mental health patients**



for **all other** type of **patients.**

Boarding is more than an inconvenience to patients. The ED is often a hectic environment and it is far from an ideal setting to treat patients with mental health conditions. There is considerable evidence that boarding compromises patient