



Executive summary: 2016 MHA Potentially Avoidable Days mental health study

To better understand how often and why Minnesotans are unable to access mental health care in the most appropriate settings, the Minnesota Hospital Association (MHA) commissioned a pilot study to track the number of “potentially avoidable days” mental and behavioral health patients spend admitted to inpatient hospital units. Potentially avoidable days are days that mental and behavioral health patients spent admitted in a community hospital inpatient unit when they could more appropriately have been treated in a different setting.

MHA relied on the Wilder Foundation to conduct the data analysis because of its experience with similar data collection efforts in the east metropolitan area. The methodology was developed by HealthPartners.

The study looked at the following potential factors contributing to potentially avoidable days for psychiatric patients:

- Delays placing a patient in an appropriate setting when a patient is approved to transfer to a state facility, residential treatment center, nursing home, group home, chemical dependency treatment service or other setting, but space in that appropriate setting is not available for the patient.
- Delays that occur when a hospital is waiting for a county, state, judicial or social service agency to complete necessary administrative actions or identify an appropriate treatment location for a patient.
- Patient or family non-adherence to care plans.
- Delays in creating or implementing a care plan in collaboration with a patient or family, executing care or discharge orders, or developing a social work plan or referral paperwork.

The study tracked de-identified patients admitted to inpatient psychiatric units at 20 participating hospitals and health systems across the state between March 15 and April 30, 2016. Of the 32,520 total bed days in all of the participating hospitals, 6,052 – or 19 percent – were considered potentially avoidable. This number translates to approximately 48,000 potentially avoidable days in a year in just these 20 hospitals.

Moreover, it does not include those patients waiting in other hospitals’ psychiatric units, as well as those emergency departments, non-psychiatric inpatient units or county jails.

The most frequently cited reasons for potentially avoidable days were lack of capacity for services provided at Community Behavioral Health Hospitals (CBHHs), chemical dependency treatment facilities, Intensive Residential Treatment Services (IRTS) and the Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center (AMRTC), as well as delays for patients involved in the judicial system.

- 14 percent of potentially avoidable days – or 836 days – occurred because a bed was unavailable at a state-run CBHH.
- 11 percent of potentially avoidable days – or 681 days – occurred because a chemical dependency treatment bed was unavailable.
- 10 percent of potentially avoidable days – or 639 days – occurred because an IRTS bed was unavailable.
- 8 percent of potentially avoidable days – or 476 days – occurred because of a delay due to a patient’s legal proceedings, including civil commitment.
- 7 percent of potentially avoidable days – or 445 days – occurred because a bed was unavailable at the state-run Anoka Metro Regional Treatment Center psychiatric hospital.

On any given day, approximately 134 patients across these 20 hospitals could have been treated in a more appropriate care setting.

The study demonstrates the following:

- Further statewide research into potentially avoidable days could inform state and county policy development.
- The two most common categories of reasons for potentially avoidable days are lack of available space and system delays in processing patients.
- Patients who remain in inpatient care after they are eligible for discharge result in fewer psychiatry beds available for new patients who need to be served in the hospital.