



Specialty Psychiatric Hospital Services 2016 Value-for-Money Audit

Why We Did This Audit

- It is estimated that one in five Ontarians (about 2.8 million people) will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lives.
- Ontario's four specialty psychiatric hospitals are the Province's only public hospitals that primarily provide mental health services. These hospitals contain about half (or 1,389) of the long-term mental health beds in the Province (about 2,760) used to treat people with the most severe or complex forms of mental illness.

Why It Matters

- People with the most severe or complex forms of mental illness who do not receive timely and proper treatment are at a higher risk of harming themselves or others.
- It costs more to treat psychiatric patients at specialty hospitals than at other hospitals or in the community, so it is important that only those who need specialty services actually receive them.
- Demand for mental health services has increased. The number of people going to hospital emergency departments for mental health reasons increased 21% across the Province between 2011/12 and 2015/16.

What We Found

- Ontario does not have provincial mental health standards for use by all hospitals in Ontario, and currently there is no set timetable to create them. Each specialty psychiatric hospital has created its own standards for patient admission, treatment and discharge, which can differ from other hospitals in Ontario. While some specialty psychiatric hospitals are now implementing new treatment methods to better treat certain mental illnesses, a process to share these new treatment methods with other specialty psychiatric hospitals has not been developed.
- Based on our review of patient files at two psychiatric hospitals, we noted that care plans were not always completed (i.e., treatment goals) and updated on a timely basis.
- Specialty psychiatric hospitals are not funded based on the volume of demand for their services, like most other hospitals. The Ministry does not collect or analyze relevant information on these hospitals to help it make more informed funding decisions. Although demand for beds has increased, there were 134 fewer beds across the Province between 2011/12 and 2015/16 for those with the most severe and complex forms of mental illness, including 32 fewer beds at specialty psychiatric hospitals.
- The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (Ministry) does not collect or report on wait times for specialty psychiatric hospital services like it does for general hospitals. Wait time data collected from the specialty psychiatric hospitals shows that wait times increased at each of the hospitals between 2011/12 and 2015/16, with some patients waiting over three months to obtain treatment. People with the most severe forms of mental illness who do not receive timely and proper treatment are at a higher risk of harming themselves or others.
- About one in 10 patients in specialty psychiatric hospitals between 2011/12 and 2015/16 did not actually need specialty care, and the percentage of beds being occupied by these people is growing. These patients could not be discharged due to the lack of available beds in supportive housing and long-term-care homes. Had these patients been discharged promptly, specialty psychiatric hospitals could have cared for an additional 1,400 people in 2015/16.
- Almost 30 years after a Ministry-commissioned report recommended that the Ministry ensure that all residents have access to mental health services in their own communities or as close to them as possible, the lack of needed care across the Province resulted in the Ministry spending almost \$10 million between 2011/12 and 2015/16 to send 127 youth to the United States for treatment.
- In 2014, the Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care opened a new building that houses its high-security program to treat patients who have been charged with criminal offences. Since then, 90 deficiencies impacting staff and patient safety were identified and contributed to 800 reported safety hazards. As a result of several hospital staff being assaulted and injured, including one who was stabbed by a patient, the Ministry of Labour was called in and issued seven compliance orders to address safety issues that occurred in the new building.

Conclusions

- Specialty psychiatric hospitals are encountering increased demand for services and are facing the same issue as other hospitals of having beds occupied by people who could better be housed in supportive care or long-term care facilities.
- More analysis and action is required by the Ministry to address the demand/wait time issues. As well, provincial mental-health standards could improve consistency in the way hospitals admit, treat and discharge people with mental illness and addictions.
- Staff safety issues should be addressed as soon as possible to ensure that staff feel safe while at work in specialty psychiatric hospitals.