



FY24 BUDGET

\$19M FOR DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH ADULT EMERGENCY ROOM DIVERSION INITIATIVE (DMH 5046-0000)

THE PROBLEM

According to the MA Health and Hospital Association, as of March 2023, 505 patients, including 311 adults and 67 older adults, were waiting in a hospital emergency room (ER) or medical-surgical floor for a behavioral health bed. While boarding was a major issue for Massachusetts patients and hospitals before the pandemic, the situation has worsened since then, exacerbated by workforce shortages. Due to the ER boarding crisis, people are not receiving mental health services in a timely way and their conditions deteriorate while they wait. Moreover, ER overcrowding hinders access to medical care for everyone.

WHAT THIS LINE ITEM ACHIEVES

- The Department of Mental Health (DMH) Adult Emergency Room Diversion Initiative funds mobile and site-based respite providers who serve adults experiencing behavioral health crises. Providers meet with individuals and families in the ER, assess their needs, and help them safely transition to therapeutic services in the community. They also divert individuals who are bound for EDs, helping them avoid unnecessary ER stays and psychiatric hospitalization.
- A typical respite stay, either site-based or at home, is 30-60 days. After respite, the provider helps the individual transition to other clinical and social services.
- The program works: between July 1, 2022 and February 10, 2023, 1,225 adults received ED diversion services in the community or completed their treatment through the program.
- To address the continuing ED boarding crisis, DMH seeks to expand the Initiative by creating or enlarging six respite programs in Western MA, four in Central MA, one each in Northeastern MA and Metro Boston, and three in Southeastern MA.
- To this end, we seek **\$19M, a \$15M increase in funding over FY23 GAA**, in DMH 5046-0000 for the DMH Adult Emergency Room Diversion Initiative. Both the FY23 budget and H1 funded this program at \$4M.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The ER Diversion Initiative helps relieve the ongoing challenges associated with ED boarding. The Initiative has demonstrated the ability to move people quickly out of the ED and into therapeutic and community-based treatment, as well as to prevent people from ending up in the ER in the first place. This is a cost-effective, proven program that keeps people in the community, connected to family and other supports.

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