



# Hochul orders hospitals to bring back psychiatric beds as part of \$1B mental health plan



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Gov. Kathy Hochul ordered New York hospitals to bring back psychiatric beds that have been offline since the start of the pandemic as part of a \$1 billion effort to improve mental health services across the state.

Under the plan, an additional 150 new psychiatric beds – 100 in New York City – would come online, as well as the reopening of 800 beds that have been unused for nearly three years. The governor is expected to elaborate on the initiative during her state of the state address Tuesday afternoon.

Hospitals that fail to bring back those psychiatric beds could face fines of \$2,000 a day, Hochul said.

“When it comes to protecting New Yorkers’ well-being, strengthening our mental health care system is essential and long overdue,” Gov. Hochul

said in a statement. “We have underinvested in mental health care for so long, and allowed the situation to become so dire, that it has become a public safety crisis, as well. This proposal marks a monumental shift to make sure no one falls through the cracks and to finally and fully meet the mental health needs of all New Yorkers.”

New York lost 1,849 psychiatric beds between 2014 to 2022 – with the number of available cots falling from 9,320 to 7,471, according to an analysis from the state’s Office of Mental Health. At the same time, the number of New Yorkers with severe mental health needs as spike to 663,000 as of 2019, according to federal mental stats.

Under Hochul’s plan the combination of new and reopened beds will bring the numbers up to 8,471, slightly lower than the statewide stats from 2014.



NYPD and FDNY detain a man and place him in an ambulance following a public disturbance on Murray Street in Manhattan on Oct. 13, 2020.

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Advocates for the mentally ill expressed concern at the governor's plan saying it focused too much on hospital beds and not enough emphasis on permanent, affordable housing.

Cal Hedigan, the CEO of Community Access, a supportive housing nonprofit, said inpatient care is "too-often coercive and traumatic."

"New York State's goal should be to increase voluntary treatment that upholds the rights and dignity of New Yorkers living with mental health concerns or experiencing mental health crises, and to provide accessible options within community-based settings," Hedigan said. "I urge the Governor to heed the wisdom of providers, advocates, and peers on this issue."

Both the governor and Mayor Eric Adams have been under pressure to address mental illness and homelessness on the streets and subways as city business attempt to bring officer workers back to Midtown and other major business districts. The pair have held multiple joint press conferences and marshaled more police officers into the subways.

Hochul's announcement dovetails with a request by Adams, after he unveiled a policy that would empower first responders to forcibly remove people from the public and send them to hospitals for psychiatric evaluation. That approach to treating mental illness has been roundly criticized by New Yorkers who'd experienced involuntary hospitalization and challenged in court.

Adams' office didn't immediately return a request for comment on Hochul's announcement.

"It's a step in the right direction," said Queens Councilmember Robert Holden, who has pushed for years for beds at Creedmoor Psychiatric Center, a 300-acre state-run facility, to be used to help relieve the shortage of places to treat the severely mentally ill. "She wants to add 1000 beds. She said that there are 3,200 New Yorkers with severe mental illness. You do the math. I don't think she goes far enough."

In addition to psychiatric beds, Hochul promised an additional 3,500 housing units for New Yorkers with mental illnesses, including 1,500 additional supportive housing units, and calls for policy changes and funding to "create systemic accountability for admissions and discharges," to expand outpatient services, and to improve mental health services for school children. All told the plan amounts to \$1 billion in spending over several years.

Other advocates voiced concerns about the emphasis on transitional housing for people with mental illnesses rather than deploying the "housing first model," which operates under the assumption people suffering from mental illness or substance abuse can't begin to manage those issues if they don't know where they're going to sleep that night.

Shelly Nortz, the Deputy Executive Director for Policy with Coalition for the Homeless, said it appeared the governor had favored "short-term transitional placements," rather than the group's recommendation for 1,000 true "housing first" units.

"Gov. Hochul's announcement sounds promising, but the devil is in the details," she said.

Correction: This story has been updated to clarify the role of first responders.