

RRH fined for failing to reopen psych beds

Violating Gov. Hochul's directive costs \$925K

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State officials issued a \$925,000 fine against Rochester Regional Health for failing to reopen dozens of inpatient psychiatric hospital beds taken offline during the pandemic, records show.

The penalty marked the first time the state Office of Mental Health enforced Gov. Kathy Hochul's directive this year that required hospitals statewide to bring 850 psychiatric beds back online by April 1, according to the governor's office.

But Rochester Regional Health is not alone in missing the deadline, as New York expects to bring back only 500 of 850 psychiatric beds by the end of this year.

Regulators asserted Rochester Regional Health was fined because it repeatedly refused to provide detailed plans and a timeline for reopening 34 psychiatric beds – 16 at Newark-Wayne Community Hospital in Newark and 18 at Unity Specialty Hospital in Rochester.

State officials on Friday noted 16 other health systems missed the April 1 deadline and submitted subsequent plans that were detailed enough to avoid fines.

“As hospitals work to return inpatient beds, the Office of Mental Health continues to work collaboratively with each facility to move this process through to completion,” the governor's office said in a statement.

USA TODAY Network has filed a public-records request seeking copies of plans that health systems submitted for restoring psychiatric beds.

What Hochul says about Rochester Regional Health fine

“We need hospitals to step up and help us address New York's mental health crisis, which is why I fought to pass legislation that toughened the penalties for those that refuse to bring psychiatric beds online,” Hochul said in a statement about the fine.

“Many hospitals are successfully collaborating with our Office of Mental Health to bring beds back online, but we will not hesitate to hold noncompliant entities accountable,” she added, as first reported by Politico.

The restoration of inpatient psychiatric beds was part of Hochul's \$1 billion plan to overhaul the state's pandemic-ravaged mental health system.

Some New Yorkers have reported being stuck for days waiting in emergency rooms before getting the proper level of mental health care. And state officials earlier this year began tracking average wait times for inpatient beds following reporting by the USA TODAY Network.

Rochester Regional Health in a statement disputed that it failed to submit a detailed plan to reopen the beds, noting many had been offline for decades. The health system added that reopening the beds would require significant renovation and construction, noting it intends to challenge the fine through an administrative

hearing. Rochester Regional Health and other health systems have asserted they are struggling to meet state requirements for psychiatric beds due in part to national medical worker staffing shortages.

Other NY hospitals missed psychiatric bed deadline

Hochul's office on Friday released a list to the USA TODAY Network of the other health systems that have plans to bring additional psychiatric beds online.

Among the health systems:

- Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester – Bassett Healthcare – Ellis Hospital – Garnet Health Medical Center (Catskills) – NY-Presbyterian – Westchester HealthAlliance (St. Mary's).
- Long Island Community Hospital (Brookhaven) v Nassau University Medical Center – Northshore University Hospital at Syosset – NYC Health + Hospitals v Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center.
- Brylin Hospital – Erie County Medical Center – Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center – UPMC Chautauqua at WCA – Samaritan Hospital (St. Peter's Health).

How long are ER waits for mental health patients in NY?

On average, New York psychiatric patients spent five and half hours in emergency rooms per visit in 2021.

Some of the longest waits across the Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley, Southern Tier, and Mohawk Valley stretched up to 12 hours, the most recent federal data show.

Further, New York ranked 10th-worst nationally in terms of longest emergency room wait times for mental health patients.

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Newark-Wayne Community Hospital is part of the Rochester Regional Health system and faces a state fine for failing to reopen some psychiatric beds at its psychiatric unit. PROVIDED BY ROCHESTER REGIONAL HEALTH

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Monday, 11/13/2023 Page .A01

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