



Unity Center for Behavioral Health  
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To whom it may concern,

Unity Center for Behavioral Health is a psychiatric hospital in Portland, Ore. that provides acute care to people experiencing a behavioral health crisis. The facility provides immediate triage and access to behavioral health specialty care to stabilize patients in crisis through our psychiatric emergency services (PES). For patients who need longer term care to stabilize and recover, Unity Center offers inpatient care for both adults and adolescents.

In its four years of operation, Unity Center has received more than 43,000 visits from people seeking care. The dedicated staff of behavioral health professionals at Unity take seriously their responsibility for providing safe, compassionate care to the people in our community with the most acute behavioral health conditions.

While Unity Center has made a major impact by enabling faster access to psychiatric care to help people in crisis begin stabilizing immediately, it is not the solution for everyone. There are people in our community who need more than traditional outpatient therapy but don't require the level of acute care that Unity provides. Moreover, many patients who are discharged from Unity Center because they no longer need treatment in an acute care environment would benefit from the opportunity to receive stepdown care to continue in their recovery.

The escalating homelessness crisis in Portland is both a cause and effect of the growing number of people with serious behavioral health conditions. Homelessness is a common condition among patients we care for at Unity Center. Lack of stable housing makes it challenging for people to access the follow up care that they need after they are discharged, increasing the likelihood that they will return to Unity in crisis again. More housing alternatives are needed for people with housing and behavioral health needs, including supported housing, mental health-focused shelter beds, and secure residential beds, along with more services to support behavioral health care for the homeless population.

Substance abuse is another issue influencing behavioral health care needs in Portland. Since the sobering station operated by Central City Concern closed in January 2020, aside from overburdened hospitals, there is nowhere to bring people who need a safe place to sober up from substance intoxication but don't otherwise need medical care. There is also a need for more substance abuse treatment services in Portland, including residential and outpatient treatment, to support people who need care for behavioral health conditions and substance abuse disorders.

The team at Unity Center remains focused on providing acute level care for the people seeking treatment at our facility. We will continue to partner with other behavioral health services organizations to help our patients get the best possible care when they leave Unity Center. However, it is clear the people we serve would benefit from greater availability of sub-acute services in our community.

Sincerely,  
Melissa Eckstein, MSSW, MBA, LCSW  
President, Unity Center for Behavioral Health