

## **A Review Of Successful Subacute Mental Healthcare Programming**

The details here provide an overview of subacute care; licensing requirements for subacute mental healthcare facilities in two states that successfully provide that care (Arizona and Wisconsin); and perspective regarding the specifics sought in Senate File 659, the 2025 legislation that authorized an interim legislative committee to study subacute mental healthcare services.

With subacute mental healthcare largely lacking and desperately needed in Iowa, we are grateful that a legislative Interim Study Committee will review the issue this year.

### **Current Iowa Snapshot**

The critical shortage of subacute mental healthcare space in Iowa is creating clogs in the treatment system. In some instances, patients must remain in inpatient psychiatric care because there are no discharge options when a lower level of care would be appropriate. That, in turn, leaves other patients unable to access care or forced to make repeated emergency room visits, as the inpatient spots are already occupied. In addition to causing strain for all involved, both of those situations are driving costs at the highest level of care, as a continuity of care options in Iowa is lacking.

The build-out of subacute mental health treatment, which is less intense and less expensive than inpatient psychiatric care, would help ensure a functioning care system in Iowa that provides patients and families with access to the support they need.

### **Ideas From Other States**

Both Arizona and Wisconsin have been successful in providing subacute mental healthcare as part of a continuum of care designed to give patients the time and support they need to participate in therapy and successfully put into practice strategies designed to enable them to regain their mental health and live healthy lives.

To help with the review underway here in Iowa, specifics regarding subacute mental healthcare in those two states are provided later in this document.

### **A General Description Of Subacute Mental Healthcare**

In general terms, subacute mental healthcare facilities provide care at a level just under full hospitalization. The treatment is less intensive than inpatient psychiatric care but is more structured than standard outpatient therapy.

In some instances, patients may go into subacute care upon discharge from inpatient psychiatric care at a hospital. But in other instances they may go straight into subacute care after an evaluation by a professional for admittance. There would be no need for a patient's care to be escalated to a higher level of treatment if that is not necessary.

Subacute-care facilities offer robust programming generally in a residential setting with direct daily care and supervision provided by medical and mental health professionals. Some patients participate voluntarily in subacute mental healthcare, while others participate as part of court-ordered intervention.

Subacute mental healthcare may be provided at a facility that also offers mental healthcare at other levels of need; or may be provided at a facility dedicated solely to subacute care but physically located near facilities offering care at other levels.

Subacute mental healthcare programs are often six weeks to three months in length to give patients the necessary time to build and put into practice healthy new habits and for the effects of any new prescribed medications to be monitored, with doses adjusted if necessary. Many patients who have completed subacute care then go on to further care at a lesser level, perhaps through a facility offering step-down mental healthcare; a sober-living center; or out-patient treatment in their home communities.

## **Licensing Details**

A particular detail is crucial in discussion of subacute mental healthcare: The type of license issued to a facility determines the focus of the treatment it provides. For example, a facility may provide both mental health and substance use treatment, but if its primary license is for mental healthcare, the thrust of the treatment it provides will be for mental healthcare with substance use treatment as a supporting component of that.

In addition to state licenses, reputable subacute mental healthcare facilities often have accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)<sup>1</sup> or the Joint Commission<sup>2</sup>.

SF 659 directs the 2025 Interim Study Committee on subacute mental healthcare to review several vital points on the topic. One of the specifics cited in the bill is whether subacute mental healthcare services would be most effectively delivered through a single subacute mental healthcare facility in Iowa or through multiple facilities in our state.

On that point in particular, we respectfully offer the perspective that the operation of successful subacute mental healthcare facilities in other states requires robust staffing from practitioners in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, psychology and social work all working together to provide daily supervision, care and programs to the patients they serve. We anticipate that successful delivery of subacute mental healthcare services in Iowa will require that same robust level of care and treatment for any facility involved.

## **Examples From Other States**

Below are details pertaining to subacute mental healthcare facilities in Arizona and Wisconsin, where that level of care has been offered for years. Direct links to the statutes and Administrative Code from those two states are provided in the footnotes of this document.

### **ARIZONA**

In Arizona, the Department of Health Services (ADHS)<sup>3</sup> is the primary licensing authority for healthcare institutions, including those providing subacute mental health care. These residential facilities are known as behavioral health agencies, with different levels of care. The specific type of license needed by a facility depends on the level of care and services it plans to offer.

Generally, facilities may have more than one type of license and provide differing levels of care on their campuses based upon the intensity of the services provided.

### **Arizona licensing authority and facility types**

- **Licensing authority:** The ADHS Bureau of Medical Facilities Licensing is responsible for issuing and regulating licenses for healthcare institutions.
- **Residential facilities:** Subacute, residential mental healthcare is provided in licensed behavioral health agencies. These facilities have different levels based on the intensity of the services provided.
- **Level 1 facilities:** For example, a Level I Behavioral Health Facility is licensed by ADHS to provide a structured treatment setting with 24-hour supervision and on-site services. There also are Level II-Level IV Behavioral Health Facilities.
- **Secure facilities:** A specific license is also available for "secure behavioral health residential facilities" for individuals with serious mental illness who are court-ordered into treatment. These facilities are limited to 16 beds.

Please see the footnote links at the end of this document to Arizona Revised Statutes Title 36 – Public Health and Safety<sup>4</sup>, particularly Chapter 4 (Health Care Institutions) and Chapter 5 (Mental Health Services).

### **WISCONSIN**

In Wisconsin, the Department of Health Services (DHS)<sup>5</sup> regulates hospitals and other healthcare facilities, including mental health treatment programs. The department's Administrative Rules, particularly Chapters 34-63, provide many definitions and standards for reference.

The Mental Health Act<sup>5</sup> within Wisconsin state law focuses on providing a continuum of care including crisis services; voluntary and involuntary treatment services; and services in less restrictive settings.

Mental healthcare facilities in Wisconsin may have more than one type of license and provide different levels of care based upon the type of services provided. Levels of care can include emergency services, inpatient treatment, residential treatment, day treatment, and community support programs.

The certification details<sup>6</sup> from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services for mental health treatment programs include direct links to definitions within the Wisconsin Administrative Code for mental health programs in that state.

1 <https://carf.org/>

2 <https://www.jointcommission.org/en-us>

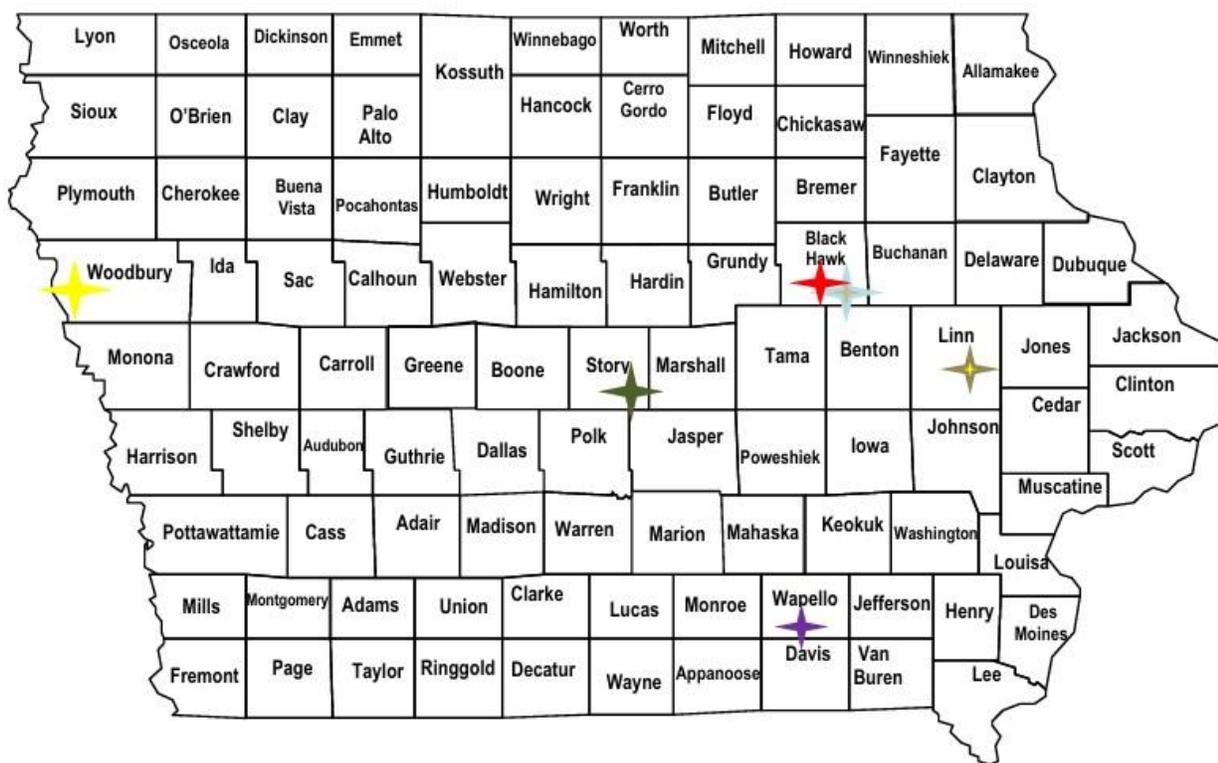
3 <https://www.azdhs.gov/licensing/index.php>

4 <https://www.azleg.gov/arsDetail/?title=36>

5 <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/51>

6 <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/regulations/mentalhealth/certification.htm>

## Subacute Services



	<b>Subacute Provider</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contact Information</b>
	North Iowa Elite Mental Health Services (10 Licensed Beds)	Waterloo/Black Hawk County	319-291-2455
	Mental Health Access Center of Linn County (2 Licensed Beds)	Cedar Rapids/Linn County	319-892-5612
	Southern Iowa Mental Health Center (3 Licensed Beds)	Ottumwa/Wapello County	641-682-8772
	Mary Greeley Medical Center (8 Licensed Beds)	Ames/Story County	515-239-6747
	Siouxland Mental Health Center (5 Licensed Beds)	Sioux City/Woodbury County	712-560-7996
	Pillar of Cedar Valley (2 Licensed Beds)	Waterloo/Black Hawk County	319-291-2509

Source: Iowa HHS 8-22-24