

Rationale for Closure of Harrisburg State Hospital

“After a year of study, and after reviewing research and testimony, the Commission finds that recovery from mental illness is now a real possibility. The promise of the New Freedom Initiative---a life in the community for everyone---can be realized.”

(Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America. (p 1), July, 2003.)

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been on the leading edge of developing community-based services for all who are affected by mental illness. The Commonwealth's history of reducing our reliance upon the uses of institutional-based care began in earnest 1979 with the closure of Holidaysburg State Hospital. From 1979 to 1984, five (5) State Mental Hospitals were closed. From 1984 to 1990, no hospitals were closed. We resumed our efforts, spurred by litigation in 1990, with the closure of Philadelphia State Hospital. From 1990 to 1998, we closed six (6) State Mental Hospitals. While we have not closed any hospital since 1998, the Commonwealth has continued with its efforts to reduce our reliance (“downsizing/rightsizing”) upon institutional care through the successful Community-Hospital Integration Program Projects (CHIPPs). And, as a result, during the past eleven years, we have closed 2203 State Mental Hospital beds.

In 1999, the Supreme Court's *Olmstead v. L.C.* decision affirmed the right of people who have disabilities to live in community settings. In 2003, the Department's approach to de-institutionalization was challenged in *Frederick L., et al v. DPW*. The Department has prevailed in part because Judge Schiller noted that “...the evidence presented demonstrates DPW's central and long-term commitment that all reasonable steps will be taken to continue the past progress...” The plan to close Harrisburg State Hospital represents a part of DPW's long-term commitment to develop and strengthen its community-based infrastructure and an array of services so the assessed 10% of the people now being served in our State Mental Hospitals will be afforded the opportunity for recovery in more open, integrated settings.

The Department's CHIPPs Initiatives have had an instrumental role in supporting the development of community-based services. The pace of our progress has been markedly affected by reliance on the CHIPPs Initiatives as a funding mechanism. The proposed consolidation of the clinical services of Harrisburg with Danville and Wernersville State Hospitals and the closure of Harrisburg State Hospital will enable the development of community-based services in order to support the direct discharge of 185 patients from the three hospitals. For Fiscal Years: 2004/2005 and 2005/2006, as a result of CHIPPs and the consolidation-closure of Harrisburg State Hospital, we expect 218 patients to be discharged and over 1000 additional people in the community who have serious mental illness to be served by the resultant development of a supportive community infrastructure.

Our investment in this initiative makes considered use of the available funds and represents the implementation of the best evidence-based clinical practice.