

The Bridge

The Bridge is a statewide collaboration between community-based housing providers, behavioral health discharge planners, other community-based professionals, and young people with lived experience. The group aims to increase the number of unaccompanied young people who return to community with safe housing and services upon exiting an inpatient behavioral health setting.

Behavioral health settings include:

- Acute Care facilities, including hospitals and Evaluation and Treatment facilities.
- Substance Use Residential Treatment Facilities
- Children’s Long-Term Inpatient Program (CLIP) facilities
- State Hospitals (Western and Eastern State Hospitals)
- Long Term Civil Commitment (LTCC) facilities

Goals

The Bridge will empower young people and their supporters by:

- **Providing Cross-System Coordination and Training:** Developing relationships among service providers. Providing training, education, and awareness of resources, as well as culturally and developmentally responsive best practices for young people returning to community from a behavioral health inpatient treatment program.
- **Return to Community Customized Planning:** Strengthening the process by return to community plan for young people who face having unstable or no housing upon discharge from inpatient behavioral health programs.
- **Envisioning Lasting Reforms and Securing Resources:** Setting goals for future education and systemic change, identifying policies and practices that could be reformed 1, 3, or 5 years from the present.

History and context

In 2018, the Washington state legislature enacted SB 6560 to ensure systems of care discharge young people to safe, stable housing. Some progress has been made since then, and more work remains to fulfill the promise of this reform, specifically for unaccompanied young people being discharged

from inpatient behavioral health treatment. In this context, the term behavioral health includes both mental health and substance use treatment.

The most recent data available show that about 75% of young people exiting a Washington state system of care (including foster care, criminal justice, and behavioral health care) who experience homelessness within 12 months of their discharge left inpatient behavioral health programs. The Bridge Program is designed to change this trend so that young people who have the courage to enter treatment have safe housing and services when they return to community.

In July 2021 HCA completed a report to establish best practice recommendations for strong, supportive communities for successful transitions from inpatient behavioral health facilities. Within this report you will find that HCA recommended educational programs to identify best practices for transitional aged youth discharges from inpatient facilities to discharge planners, managed care organizations and community partners that work with young people during this stressful time.

The report identifies the importance of provider and managed care organization collaboration and “warm hand offs” during care coordination to identify follow-up care, housing vouchers, natural supports, education, employment supports and other basic needs such as food, ID cards etc. Additionally, this report emphasized the importance of educating community providers on inclusivity, trauma informed care, developmentally appropriate goal setting, identifying, and addressing the stigma related to youth homelessness and to identify systematic gaps that need additional innovation and support.

The funding for the program comes in part from ESSB 5693 and additional proviso funding during special session of this year, for fiscal years 2023 to June 2025. Within Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5693, section 215, it states funding was “provided solely for the authority to continue and increase contract services to provide information and support related to safe housing and support

services for youth exiting inpatient mental health and/or substance use disorder facilities to stakeholders, inpatient treatment facilities, young people, and other community providers that serve unaccompanied youth and young adults”.

Budget

\$200,000 for FY24 & FY25 from General State Fund per Proviso CBH 215 (81), 5187. With an additional \$3000,000 for FY24 & FY25 acquired per Special Session Sec 33 (11), 5536. Totaling \$250,000 annually.

Reports

- [Safe and supportive transition to stable housing for youth ages 16-25, Best practice recommendations for strong supportive communities](#)
- [Improving stability for youth exiting systems of care](#)
- Unaccompanied youth, publicly funded system of care RCW [43.330720](#); Homeless youth RCW [4.330.700](#)
- [SB 6560](#)
- [Progress report SB6560](#)

Participants

- Discharge Planners
- Case Managers
- Young people with lived experience
- Housing & Community Providers

How to get involved

The Bridge Program meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month from 1:00-2:30 p.m. To learn more or get involved with the group, contact Jim Theofelis at: jim@northstaradvocates.org.

Key partners

North Star Advocates, Mockingbird Society, A Way Home Washington & Building Changes

More information

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