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Louisiana drug, substance abuse programs might remain open

Mike Hasten / Louisiana Gannett News/Baton Rouge

Posted on May 28, 2002

BATON ROUGE - Concerns over funding problems that could force the closure of substance abuse programs across the state might now be resolved, says the head of state Office of Addictive Disorders, so he's turning his attention to a bigger problem - inadequate funding to treat the high numbers of people in the state in need.

Michael Duffy, acting assistant secretary in the Department of Health and Hospitals, said he has been told that funding for 124 beds to serve women with dependent children could be carried over from this year, so those facilities probably won't be closed. Currently, the programs has a 93 percent daily utilization rate.

Even if that funding is continued, the state still falls far short of meeting the needs of all the people seeking treatment, Duffy said. But if the Legislature approves a proposed increase in cigarette and alcohol taxes, more of the needs can be met.

A national study shows Louisiana is meeting only about 8 percent of the need for adult services, Duffy said, and only 4.5 percent of the adolescent needs. The national average is about 21 percent.

"Without stabilized funding, it's impossible to close that gap," he said. "To get to the national average would take \$66 million."

The current state funding for the Office of Addictive Disorders is \$25 million, but \$8.1 million of that is funneled directly to drug courts, leaving \$16.9 million to fund inpatient, outpatient and halfway house programs. It also receives federal funding.

Across the state, Louisiana has 328 adult and 55 adolescent inpatient beds, 33 medical detox beds, 238 adult and 33 adolescent halfway house offerings and, 57 outpatient programs. Currently, only 29 of the medical detox beds are open - 20 in New Orleans and 9 of the 13 beds in Lafayette.

"The rest of the state has nothing," Duffy said. "We have a waiting list of 700 to 750 per day waiting for 24-hour care. That's everything from detox to inpatient to half-way houses."

Acadiana Recovery Center Administrator Janice Ox says she has not been informed of any impending reductions. The Lafayette facility contracts with the state for residential treatment.

The state also operates the Lafayette Alcohol and Drug Abuse Clinic, an outpatient facility that provides detox and other care.

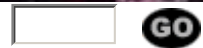
Those are examples of facilities around the state that his office counts on to provide services to people who need help but can't get into state hospitals, Duffy said. Funding for those facilities is safe in the current proposed budget, "but I don't know what might happen tomorrow."

Duffy is placing high hopes on the Legislature approving bills by Rep. Sharon Weston Broome, D-Baton Rouge, which would direct more money to substance abuse treatment by increasing alcohol taxes. The House Ways and Means Committee debated the bills May 23, but did not vote. It's scheduled to reconsider the bill today.

As expected, strong opposition was offered by the alcohol industry, but Duffy said he hopes lawmakers will approve the bills, which would provide \$64 million to address

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the gap between what Louisiana spends and the national average for funding substance abuse treatment.

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