New Hampshire Hospital’s crisis unit to open one year later than planned

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New Hampshire Hospital plans to open its new 10-bed mental health crisis unit in July, one year later than expected.

While construction on the wing was completed in July 2015, the state psychiatric hospital has struggled to recruit the nurses it needs to staff the unit.

“We’re beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel,” said New Hampshire Hospital CEO Bob MacLeod, who reported the hospital has hired four of the eight nurses it needs.

The crisis unit is meant to ease pressure on local emergency rooms where patients in psychiatric crisis are often forced to wait until a bed at New Hampshire Hospital becomes available.

Often, patients are admitted involuntarily because they’re experiencing serious behavioral health issues.

New Hampshire Hospital’s waitlist reached a one-year high this week, as 50 people across New Hampshire, including several in correctional facilities, waited Tuesday for one of the facility’s 158 beds to open up.

“We do have a spike, and we’re working very hard to mitigate that spike as best we can, knowing full (well) we can’t address everyone waiting on the list right away,” MacLeod said.

The hospital has faced a staffing shortage recently. But since the Executive Council approved raises for hospital nurses in January, the facility has been able to recruit more job applicants, MacLeod said.

New Hampshire has been focused on improving its mental health system and expanding services for people in crisis since it settled a lawsuit on the subject several years ago.