



Officials break ground on \$150M inmate hospital in Joliet

March 18, 2019

Illinois Department of Corrections officials Monday broke ground at the Joliet Treatment Center on a hospital that will serve inmates diagnosed as mentally ill.

The \$150 million facility will provide 250 beds to meet the most critical needs of the state's mentally ill inmates, officials said. The hospital is expected to open in the late summer or early fall of 2021.

"Our top level of mental health care will be in this new building," Illinois Department of Corrections Director John Baldwin said.

The Joliet Treatment Center is a residential treatment unit that opened in 2017 to address inmates' mental health needs. The facility, located at the former Illinois Youth Center, opened to address concerns stemming from a 2007 class action lawsuit regarding the treatment of mentally ill inmates in Illinois prisons. The state settled the lawsuit in 2015 and has opened residential treatment centers in Joliet, Dixon, Pontiac and Logan for inmates with mental health concerns.

IDOC officials noted nearly half of all inmates have been diagnosed with some sort mental health illness. The hospital on the Joliet campus will help address the most critical needs of inmates.

“We are the state’s largest mental health system by far,” Baldwin said at Monday’s groundbreaking ceremony. “This (hospital) will allow us to act like we’re supposed to be the largest system.”

Of the 250 beds, 150 will be used to address mental health concerns, 50 for general health care needs and another 50 for inmates with general health and mental health needs. IDOC plans to staff the facility with about 450 health care professionals including doctors, nurses, dieticians, occupational and physical therapists and psychiatrists.

“Illinois is mending, improving and setting right its treatment of offenders with mental illness,” said Sen. Pat McGuire, D-Joliet, who lobbied for repurposing the former IYC for the new treatment center that opened in 2017.

Officials Monday said the 480,000 square-foot facility will “look and act” like a typical hospital; not a prison facility. But the hospital will include different security features to allow for separating inmates or providing care in isolation if necessary.

The facility also will have room to grow if needed in the future, officials said.

The Joliet Treatment Center currently has about 100 inmates who are receiving mental health care. The hospital will provide the next level of care for the state’s inmate population.

IDOC officials explained inmates may move back and forth between levels of care – from residential treatment centers to the hospital or back – but that level of care is meant to address needs; not serve as a punitive measure. Baldwin said the ultimate goal is to get inmates the care they need and give them the support needed to reintegrate into their community.

“You will look at this in the next 50 years as the place that helped turn the Illinois Department of Corrections around from being a punitive place to being a restorative justice operation,” Baldwin said.

Joliet’s Mayor Bob O’Dekirk said the hospital signals a continued investment by the state in Joliet. In addition to the jobs created for hospital staffing needs, the project is expected to create 200 construction jobs.

“It’s great to see the state reinvest and bring this property back up to par,” O’Dekirk said.

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/daily-southtown/news/ct-sta-new-joliet-health-facility-st-0319-story.html>