

# Why are Kaiser mental health clinicians on strike?

**Kaiser does not staff its psychiatry departments with enough mental health clinicians — psychologists, therapists, social workers, and psychiatric nurses — to meet the needs of its patients.** Due to this staff shortage, our schedules are booked solid. Patients are forced to wait weeks, even months for treatment. For patients suffering from depression, anxiety, and other debilitating mental conditions, these delays can be insurmountable obstacles.

As mental health clinicians, we have an ethical obligation to advocate for our patients, whose conditions often make it difficult for them to advocate for themselves. For four years we have done all we can to persuade Kaiser officials to correct these ethical and legal violations, to no avail. That's why Kaiser's 2,600 California mental health clinicians and more than 700 other Kaiser employees — optical workers and healthcare professionals — are on strike, here in our community and throughout the state. **Kaiser is letting our patients down every day, refusing to provide the timely, appropriate care they pay for with their monthly premiums and that Kaiser is required by law to provide.**

In 2013, California's Department of Managed Health Care fined Kaiser **\$4 million** for systemically understaffing its psychiatry department and falsifying records to conceal long appointment wait times. Yet Kaiser's systemic violations of state law continue. After an initial diagnostic appointment, **our patients frequently must endure waits of 4 to 12 weeks for treatment, making effective, ongoing therapy nearly impossible.**

And the situation is getting worse. This year, under the Affordable Care Act, Kaiser's California enrollment has increased by a quarter million members. Staffing levels, already too low, are not keeping pace with enrollment.

Meanwhile, "nonprofit" Kaiser is enjoying record profits. **Kaiser has made more than \$14 billion since 2009, and this year's profits are up 40 percent over last year's record.**

Last month, we presented Kaiser with a **commonsense solution:** clinician-management committees in each facility that can work together to determine adequate staffing levels and outsourcing needs, with help from a neutral, outside expert if the two sides cannot agree. It's a simple and effective solution already in place in other health care systems. Once again, Kaiser failed to act.

With soaring profits and a \$30 billion cash reserve, Kaiser can afford to invest in its mental health services by recruiting new clinicians, retaining experienced staff, and **staffing its clinics in compliance with state law and in accordance with its ethical obligations as a healthcare provider.**

## How can you help?

- Join us on the picket line.
- Call or write to your local and state representatives and educate them on this important issue.
- Call or write to the Kaiser executives listed below and tell them you support our efforts.

Tell them Kaiser should be investing its record profits in its mental health services to ensure that its patients receive the timely, quality care they need and deserve.

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