

Prevention Is Seen Answer To State School Crowding

Despite temporary steps being taken to ease overcrowding at Willowbrook State School and other state institutions for the mentally retarded, the problem will not be eliminated, according to Dr. Harold H. Berman, director at Willowbrook.

Dr. Berman, who said his institution has 32 per cent more patients than it was built to accommodate, estimated that there are 500,000 mentally retarded persons in New York State. Of these, 21,567 are accommodated in state facilities.

"If 500 or 600 of my patients were sent to another institution tomorrow," Dr. Berman said, "the space would be filled by others within a week." "It's not a question of space," he said. "You can't leave these problems on the outside, even though you haven't actually got the room."

THE ANSWER to eliminating overcrowding of these facilities, he stressed, is prevention.

Dr. Berman said Willowbrook has a capacity of 4,273 and an enrollment of 6,201. There are actually 5,639 patients there now, he said, but several hundred are staying with their families for the summer and will return next month.

Also, he said, there are more than 100 patients at the school's annex in Gouverneur Hospital, Manhattan.

IN A REPORT on steps being

taken to relieve overcrowding at the state's institutions for the mentally retarded, the State Mental Hygiene Department called the situation "serious" and said it is especially acute for children under five years of age.

Dr. Berman said there is a waiting list at Willowbrook for children under 5.

The department said the 21,567 mentally retarded children and adults in state facilities are being accommodated in

space designed for 16,980.

Two new schools now under construction for the mentally retarded in Huntington, L. I., and Seneca, will reduce overcrowding, the department said, but will not eliminate it. The Huntington school will have a capacity of 2,876 persons and the one in Seneca 2,500.

THE DEPARTMENT said its schools on Staten Island and in Letchworth Village and Wassaic

are accommodating 13,726 patients in facilities designed for 11,000.

To further ease overcrowding, it stated, 700 of the excess patients will be moved to the Bronx State Hospital when the first new building there is completed next spring. Dr. Berman didn't know how many of these might come from Willowbrook.

Another step taken to relieve overcrowding, the department said, is the Legislature's authorization of the placement of children under five years old in private institutions at state expense.