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# Bed shortage widens

## institution-community rift

The shortage of community beds is one of the biggest problems facing New York State's mentally retarded population, agree state officials, parents and advocates.

A spokeswoman for the state's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities said her agency estimated that the shortage of residential beds, both in the community and in institutions, will reach 9,000 by 1991.

The decrease in institutional beds is to be expected, as the state continues its movement of patients into community residences. But the state is not establishing group homes and supervised apartments fast enough to meet demand.

Staten Island presently has 38 group homes and supervised apartments, each serving three to 10 clients, and housing a total of 166 people.

Yet, more than 200 people here are currently awaiting placement.

That includes about 100 patients at Staten Island Developmental Center and the Karl Warner Center, who have Staten Island listed as their "borough of origin" and should be placed in this community if and when they leave the institution. Another 200

on the Willowbrook campus who are orphaned or abandoned and have no borough-of-origin could also be placed here.

Of even more significance is the demand for placements from families of community clients who have never been institutionalized. The Island's Borough Developmental Services Office has a waiting list of 100, a number expected to increase.

While many families prefer to keep a retarded child or adult at home, there are times when that is no longer possible — when parents become old or die; in times of family crisis like divorce or illness; when a patient needs more specialized care — and an alternate living situation is necessary.

In the past, such patients were placed in an institution; now the state considers that only as a last resort. Thus, the shortage of community beds is particularly acute.

"This morning I dealt with an 85-year-old mother who has had a heart attack and cannot care for her 60-year-old daughter. But there are no openings," said Joel Levy of the Young Adult Institute in Manhattan.

Marjory Ames, of the Inter-agency Council for Developmen-

tal Disabilities in Manhattan, said she knows of one agency that has a waiting list of over 1,000 community clients with a median age of 42 who need placement in community residences.

"You have to think of the implications of this," said Ms. Ames. "These people have been taken care of by their families for more than 40 years with minimal or no help from the state. The parents are in their 60s, they could die at any time and they are scared. All the agencies can say to them is: 'Just don't die right now.'"

The situation is complicated by the Willowbrook consent decree, the 1975 agreement by state officials to improve care for patients at Willowbrook State School, since renamed Staten Island Developmental Center. A major aspect of that agreement is the movement of patients from the institution into the community.

Because of the agreement, the state must move more than 750 patients out of Willowbrook by 1985. As a result, Willowbrook patients are receiving priority placement as new group homes open. Not surprisingly, that angers advocates of community clients.

The obvious solution, of course, is to establish enough group