

**TO: The Oregon House Health Care Committee**  
**FR: Larry Conner MA LPC, COPACT Government Relations Chair**  
**DA: April 1, 2015**  
**RE: Support for HB 3427**

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Chair Greenlick and Members of the Committee:

The Coalition of Oregon Professional Associations of Counseling and Therapy (COPACT) represents Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs) and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs). **We support HB 3427, which will attempt to stabilize reimbursement rates for psychotherapy so that more private practitioners will be able to stay in business, and thus Oregonians will be able to access needed mental health care in a timely fashion.**

Licensed Professional Counselors and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists are highly trained Masters level mental health providers who offer psychotherapy services to individuals of all ages, families, couples, groups, and organizations throughout Oregon. There are 4,500 LPCs, LMFTs and registered interns. We estimate that each week LPCs, LMFTs and registered interns work with over 70,000 Oregonians seeking services in mental health clinics, private practices, colleges, hospitals, prisons, and rehabilitation agencies.

There are four points I want to make about this complicated issue of psychotherapy reimbursement rates before I ask you to support HB 3427 with the proposed amendment:

1. Psychotherapy reimbursement rate reductions are directly tied to access to care. As rates drop more and more private practitioners either close their practices or go with out-of-network practices, the latter of which puts their services out of reach of most Oregonians.
2. Psychotherapy reimbursement rates have been dropping for 20 years. The last study I saw showed an 8% reimbursement reduction from 2007-2013. That follows much larger drops prior to that time.
3. There is no negotiation of psychotherapy reimbursement rates between insurers and providers – we simply don't have that kind of negotiating power. Rate reductions are announced randomly, with little justification, and the provider either accepts them or has to leave the network. It is a take it or leave it proposition. Our hands are tied, and the end result is private practitioners being driven out of practice or providing much more expensive out-of-network care.
4. We believe poor reimbursement rates, along with other factors, lead to a lack of access to mental health services in Oregon. With a small supply of providers, patients can't get an appointment in a timely manner. There is no way CCOs and insurers can offer the mental health care that is required by the Affordable Care Act without private practitioners picking up the overhead for most of those services. The reason for private practitioners closing their practices is an inability to afford to continue.

COPACT supports HB 3427 with the proposed amendment because it is a sincere attempt to stop the bleeding. We think it is a good start, yet we have some concerns.

1. We are concerned about tying our reimbursement rates to that of psychiatrists without some reassurance that insurers will not reduce rates paid to them as a way of reducing reimbursement to us all.
2. We are not happy about language that focuses on how much insurers can cut reimbursement rates without justification. We would prefer to conclude that reimbursement rates are in the basement, and now it is time for cost of living increases instead of cuts.

COPACT is very much in support of the amendment that sets up a task force to address policy questions regarding mental health care. We believe poor reimbursement rates are just one of several factors that negatively impact access to mental and behavioral health care in Oregon. Currently, closed or limited mental health provider networks force many Oregonians in need to have to wait unreasonably or go out of network to receive services. That is potentially life threatening. We have emergency rooms for medical emergencies. In mental health we have overburdened crisis and hospital systems teamed with too limited networks of private practice providers, most of whom, at any given time, have practices closed to new patients.

COPACT supports HB 3427 as an attempt to stop the reimbursement bleeding in order to help Oregonians get access to mental health practitioners in private practice. We support it as a positive step in an ongoing discussion of how to make our mental health system work, and how to make mental health services easily available and affordable for those in need.

**I ask you to support HB 3427 with amended language and to pass it to the House Floor.**

Thank your for this opportunity to appear before your committee.