



February 1, 2016

The Honorable Sara Gelser
Chair, House Committee on Human Services and Housing
State Capitol
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Investments in affordable housing

Dear Senator Gelser and members of the committee:

Providence Health & Services continues a vibrant, nearly 160 year, history of caring for individuals within our ministries, in addition to seeking out those in most need. Today, with the support of our frontline caregivers and a diverse group of community partners, Providence's commitment to serving the unmet need in our communities is stronger than ever.

Housing is an important, if not the most important, social determinant of health. This is evident in national research, but we also see it in our local data. Based on information collected during Providence's last Community Health Needs Assessment in 2013, stable housing was recognized as an unmet need in each area we serve – from the Columbia Gorge to Southern Oregon. At our Community Resource Desks located at clinics and hospitals in East Portland, housing/rent assistance has been identified as the top need over the past 9 months.

In Oregon, we are seeing statewide trends that reflect a desperate need for access to safe, affordable housing. While a clear solution hasn't been identified, there is growing momentum from a diverse group of stakeholders to find solutions – and support from the state is essential to our success. As an organization serving children and families that lack adequate housing on a daily basis, it is clear to Providence that living conditions are inevitably linked to an individual's health outcomes. Over the last four years we've become increasingly involved in a number of collaboratives, including the Oregon Health and Housing Learning Collaborative which is focused on aligning and coordinating the shared objectives of health care and housing partners.

In a recent study, Providence's Center for Outcomes Research assessed the impact of stable housing on some of Portland's most vulnerable residents residing at Bud Clark Commons. A couple key findings included:

- Reduction in medical costs: After moving into BCC the average resident saw a significant reduction in annual Medicaid claims.
- Primary care visits increased, while ED visits declined: Residents were also able to maintain connections to outpatient behavioral health services, primary care and pharmacies after moving in.

While these findings are exciting, the larger message we are taking away from this study and many other studies that are beginning to provide real data about the housing crisis in Oregon is – the relationship between health and housing is critical, and potentially the next major step in health care transformation in Oregon.

- For acutely ill or vulnerable adults - supportive housing effectively serves as a health care intervention.
- For children living with housing instability - safe and affordable housing limits instances of trauma which often lead to long-term health issues.

Providence strongly supports the series of affordable housing bills under consideration this session, which aim at leveraging state money and allowing local communities to develop housing strategies specific to their needs. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment; we look forward to partnering with the state and our community partners in this critical work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pam Mariea-Nason". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "P".

Pam Mariea-Nason, RN, MBA
Executive, Community Health Division
Providence Health & Services - Oregon