



**Bill Hall
County Commissioner**

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Testimony by Bill Hall
March 8, 2017

Chair Rayfield and Members of the Subcommittee: I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. For the record: My name is Bill Hall. I am in my fourth term as a Lincoln County Commissioner and am currently serving as President of the Association of Oregon Counties.

Oregon Counties are on the front line in providing mental health and public health services. As AOC president, I have made my presidential priority expanded participation in the Stepping Up initiative, a joint project of the Council of State Governments, the National Association of Counties and the American Psychiatric Association. Building a more robust community mental health system, including treatment, supportive housing and wraparound services, is the best means we have to reduce the number of people with mental illness in the justice system, including the aid and assist population that threatens to overwhelm the state hospital. Strategic investments now will save taxpayer dollars and produce safer communities in the long run.



I know you are facing severe challenges in dealing with the deficit, but I can't let this opportunity go by to encourage you to keep the effort to modernize Oregon Public Health services on your horizon. Public Health is evolving from its traditional role of safety net service provider to a more active role in health education and prevention. We're doing great things with the modest resources we have currently, and we have been working in partnership with our neighboring health departments in Benton and Linn Counties even before modernization efforts began, but as long as Oregon remains near the bottom of the states in per capita support for public health, our opportunities to produce long-term change in behaviors will be limited.

Right now, state general fund dollars for public health support communicable disease investigations, Material Child Health nurse home visiting, tobacco use and prevention, as well as reproductive health and our four school-based Health Centers. All of these are great programs.

Yet tobacco is our number one killer. One in three adults in Lincoln County smoke, contributing to 68 percent of people living with at least one chronic disease. The 68-thousand dollars a year we receive to combat the tobacco industry is up against millions they're spending to recruit the next generation of users. Our communicable disease program receives 50-thousand dollars a year and we're seeing record numbers of sexually transmitted diseases in the county. It's becoming harder and harder for our dedicated staff to keep up.

We'd love to be able to put a nurse in the community to educate people about disease prevention. What if we could offer an ongoing nutrition and education program, and stop middle and high schoolers from ever trying that first cigarette? It may be an obvious point, but I'll say it anyway. Healthier people avoid significant costs to the health care system. They live happier and more productive lives. It's a smart investment for individuals, families, communities, and the state we all love and call home.

