
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

March 18, 2020

Chair Roblan, Chair Holvey, and Members of the Joint Special Committee on Coronavirus Response,

While we are only in the initial phases of understanding the scope of COVID-19's impact on the immediate and long-term health, well-being, and livelihood of Oregonians, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon is grateful for the leadership Governor Brown, the Legislature, our state agencies, and local leaders have already shown with their immediate actions and preventative measures that are helping to curb the growth of this pandemic and save lives.

Planned Parenthood health centers are critical medical providers in the communities we serve—often functioning as the primary or only provider for many patients that come through our health center doors. Closing those doors or limiting health services, particularly during this unprecedented time, will have significant impacts on the health and well-being of these communities, including immediate and long-term consequences on rates of breast cancer, cervical cancer, sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancies. Planned Parenthood health centers across Oregon remain open and are seeing and treating patients. These health centers have rescheduled and delayed non-urgent and routine care, such as annual exams, to preserve personal protection equipment (PPE) and focus on more urgent health care, including providing essential health services like medication and surgical abortions that are both critical and time-sensitive.

Where possible, the health centers are transitioning services to telemedicine to maintain and expand access to care while reducing incidents of exposure for staff and patients and preserving PPE supplies. The Oregon Health Authority's (OHA) continued work to reduce and remove barriers to utilizing telemedicine for our Oregon Health Plan populations is greatly appreciated. As with countless other providers and hospitals across the state, Planned Parenthood health centers are grappling with a shortage of PPE but will continue to provide essential reproductive health care for as long as they can. The leadership of our healthcare affiliates is working around the clock to maintain services, adapt, and contribute to flattening the curve of the pandemic as immediately as possible.

Our top priorities at this time are as follows:

1. Telemedicine and remote services. We appreciate the work already done by OHA. Any continued adaptations and work done to ensure as much access as possible and reimbursement is critical.
2. Personal Protection Equipment (PPE). Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette (PPCW), like most providers, is very concerned about the national shortage of PPE equipment including masks and gowns. We already lack the gowns necessary to provide our services. PPCW is triaging patients and services in order to have the required PPE to keep staff safe. We are receiving the basic PPE that we routinely order, for now. A small supply of gowns (25-50) and surgical masks are the highest need for PPE equipment. There is also the possibility of needing cleaning/sanitation supplies in the future. Expansion and support of telemedicine/remote services will ease some of the demand and concern for PPE shortages.
3. Emergency funding and support for lost wages. We expect to have financial requests for this emergency response. PPCW and Planned Parenthood of Southwestern Oregon (PPSO) are making urgent investments to support staff working remotely, changing policies to allow staff to access additional leave time to care for themselves, and their families and kids out of school. Although all health centers are

currently open, we are planning for the likely scenario of loss of business both through triaging patients and visits, and fewer staff being able to work.

Additionally, Planned Parenthood health centers are committed to working in collaboration across the health care system to mitigate the burden placed on hospitals and emergency rooms, whose limited capacity will soon be inundated with patients in need of care. We would like to know where we best fit into OHA's planning and vision around this in this time of rapid response. Planned Parenthood health centers will be proud to be an integral partner both for reproductive health care and for future needs in our community such as allowing for utilization of their facilities and staffing to support the pandemic response if that is needed. PPCW and PPSO are making internal preparations to best facilitate their ability to quickly and nimbly help the community and wider health system in responding to coronavirus. Planned Parenthood health centers are working with agencies to see how they can assist with COVID testing and serve to fill gaps in health care services and facilities.

As our communities are rapidly trying to adjust to this outbreak and the measures necessary to slow the spread of the virus, Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon is working in coalition with many community partners to address the emerging needs and impacts to our economic security and ability to care for our families and focus on mitigating long-term ramifications. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon is a signatory on a letter that was sent to the Governor and the Legislature outlining the critical social, racial, and economic justice policy issues—including expanding access to health care by allowing the uninsured to sign up for insurance; strengthening worker protections; providing more flexibility and expanded benefits for unemployment insurance, paid sick leave, and family medical leave; and working to address housing and food insecurity—that need to be addressed as part of the response to coronavirus.

We want to acknowledge the incredible work of some of our partners like AFLCIO, Family Forward, SEIU and the Oregon Nurses Association to identify the economic and workforce solutions that are needed in our community at this time. Planned Parenthood supports addressing the variety of issues that could provide relief economically particularly to our staff and other healthcare workers on the front lines and to all workers, parents, caregivers, non-profits, and so many others who may be faced with incredible economic hardship due to the pandemic and subsequent school closures, business closures, and bans on large gatherings. In particular we would highlight the need for support for childcare access, unemployment, and solutions that support those in the most need.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to making sure no one is left behind in our state's response to this unprecedented crisis. Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon looks forward to continuing to work with you on these policy solutions to serve our communities.

Sincerely,

Emily McLain
Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon