
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon

June 1, 2020

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Senate Interim Committee on Health Care,

While we are just beginning to understand 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 actions our state agencies, the Legislature, and Governor Brown have taken to decrease the spread of the virus and to adapt the health care system to be able to respond to the pandemic while also working to ensure continued access to non-COVID 19 related health care.

Planned Parenthood health centers are critical medical providers in the communities they serve—often functioning as the primary or only provider for many patients. During the pandemic, our affiliates, Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette (PPCW) and Planned Parenthood Southwestern Oregon (PPSO) have played a key role in flattening the curve and contributing to the greater public health mission to decrease the spread of the virus, decrease burden on hospital staff, and avoid overwhelming the system.

Over the last few months, PPCW and PPSO have complied with the Governor's orders by delaying or rescheduling appointments that are core to our services, such as annual exams, to preserve personal protection equipment (PPE) and flatten the curve. Health centers have focused 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 have transitioned services to telemedicine to maintain and expand access to care while reducing incidents of exposure for staff and patients and preserving PPE supplies. All of this means PPCW and PPSO have not been providing their usual volume of services, spending revenue to move to telemedicine, and doing extra work to make all these adjustments.

As the state slowly reopens, Planned Parenthood health centers are expanding the number of available services, for instance, resuming vasectomy procedures, LARC care, and triaged problem check visits. The ultimate goal is to keep patients and providers safe even as more patients are seen in-clinic. The health centers will still keep the total people in the health centers to a minimum; patients will be required to wear masks; and most patients will do an intake over the phone prior to arriving in the health center. However, we expect that this adjusted care model will be long term and extend in some fashion through the summer and fall. Like many other health care and behavioral and mental health providers, our health centers expect that the volume of services will continue to be significantly less than what is typical.

Our top priorities at this time include:

1. **Telemedicine guidelines and payment parity:** We very much appreciate OHA and DCBS's tireless work to expand access to telehealth and decrease the barriers for providers and patients to participate in telemedicine. We ask that those policy advances are maintained and that additional rules, structures, and systems are implemented to ensure that a robust platform of telehealth services is available to any Oregonian, regardless of whether they have private or public insurance. Maintaining the changes made to Medicaid payment parity and guidelines for telehealth and applying those new standards to all state-regulated plans will ensure the greatest access to care for all Oregonians in a landscape that was already shifting towards this kind of care.

2. Personal Protection Equipment: Even as our health centers have transitioned as much as possible to telemedicine and no-touch consultations, they continue to see patients in-person and as such need adequate PPE to keep everyone safe. There is continued concern about the national shortage of PPE equipment including masks and gowns. PPCW is triaging patients and services in order to have the required PPE to keep staff safe. They are receiving the basic PPE that they 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.
3. Emergency funding and support for lost wages: OHA has been working diligently with CCOs to support healthcare providers during this period of decreased volume by leveraging existing funds and budgets. We hope OHA continues to provide robust guidance to CCOs on the administration of these gap payments and continues to maintain accountability and transparency within that process.

We also encourage the legislature to use reserve funds to protect the services that benefit the most vulnerable Oregonians. For many of our patients, Planned Parenthood is their source for primary care, and more than half of our patients rely on OHP. We anticipate a spike in both OHP enrollment and in the provision of deferred care, and as such expect to have financial and budgetary requests for this emergency response. In addition to utilizing reserve and coronavirus relief funds to protect programs and services, we ask that the legislature defends existing revenues, with some discretion for tax support that helps low-income Oregonians.

Closing health center doors or limiting health services, particularly during this unprecedented time, will have significant impacts on the health and well-being of many communities, including immediate and long-term consequences on rates of breast cancer, cervical cancer, sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancies. The CARES Act took steps towards improving access to COVID-19 related services, but the package lacks support for non-hospital safety net providers. As such, it is imperative that these providers are included within Oregon's funding priorities. This is critically important for sexual and reproductive healthcare providers, who continue to be targeted by an administration that politicizes healthcare and abortion access even during a pandemic.

Sincerely,

Emily McLain
Executive Director
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon