



Improve Access to Genetic Counseling Services for Oregonians

Support HB 4074

Genetic conditions profoundly impact people's lives, and genetic counselors work to serve the diverse needs of Oregonians effected by such conditions. HB 4074 requires those who practice genetic counseling be licensed genetic counselors through the Oregon Health Authority Health Licensing Office.

The profession of genetic counseling

Genetic counselors are health professionals with specialized graduate degrees, and training in medical genetics, genomics and counseling who help patients access and interpret critical genetic information. Genetic counselors work as members of a healthcare team, providing risk assessment, education and support to individuals and families at risk for, or diagnosed with, a variety of inherited conditions.

Among other services, genetic counselors:

- Identify and order genetic laboratory tests;
- Help people understand and adapt to medical and familial implications of genetic disease; and,
- Calculate the risk of occurrence or recurrence of genetic conditions;

Increasing demand and access to services

The rapidly expanding role of genomics in healthcare is increasing the demand for genetics professionals. From neuromuscular disorder testing to diagnosing and treating cancer, patients are accessing more insights into their health and treatment options than ever before with the help of genomic medicine. Other states have responded to the expanding role of genomics, and currently 29 states require genetic counselors to be licensed.

Genetic counseling is an extremely specialized health care service, with fewer than 60 genetic counselors practicing in Oregon. While many Oregonians need genetic counseling services, access to providers is limited. Currently, patients must seek referrals to physicians who work on a unique care team with genetic counselors – teams

that are often located in metro areas – to access critical genetic counseling services.

The importance of licensure

Licensure provides Oregonians certainty in knowing that their provider has met necessary training and certification standards, and reduces the administrative and logistical burden on patients.

Improving patient access to critical health care information by giving genetic counselors the ability to work directly with a patient's primary provider no matter where they are located; this will allow more Oregonians to maintain a relationship with their community provider as they receive genetic counseling services.

Saving healthcare dollars through better informed testing for patients. Healthcare providers without genetics training often order more expensive genetic tests than are needed, resulting in unnecessary healthcare spending. Some insurance companies are also starting to require genetic counseling prior to authorizing payment for genetic testing due to demonstrated cost-saving effects.

Protecting patients from harm caused by receiving inaccurate information about genetic risks from individuals who do not have the specialized training in genetics, genomics and counseling. Licensure provides Oregonians certainty in knowing that their provider has met necessary education standards

Providing an accountability mechanism for reporting, investigating and sanctioning claims of incompetent, unethical and/or unlawful behavior of a genetic counselor.

Questions?

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