



OPA Supports HB 2508

I am writing on behalf of the Oregon Psychological Association to express our support for Oregon House Bill 2508. Telemedicine has become a crucial and necessary component of our health care system in the past decade, especially in the last 12 months. As COVID-19 spread rapidly throughout our county, telemedicine offered a safe, viable access point to care for people who otherwise would not have sought health services. Telemedicine visits increased exponentially in 2020, while an estimated 93% of those visits were not COVID-related. From a quality standpoint, telemedicine has been shown not only to be as effective as usual care but in some ways more advantageous. Studies demonstrate that telemedicine offers similar (or even superior) outcomes than usual care while decreasing wait times, reducing time to treatment, and increasing the number of patients receiving indicated diagnostic tests or treatment. As a licensed psychologist with a decade of primary care experience, I have seen telemedicine revolutionize our ability to provide necessary behavioral health care access. In 2018, I helped start a tele-behavioral health program that brought services to Astoria and Clatskanie, two communities with very few resources. Since that time, the program has seen no significant differences in engagement rates or clinical benefits than in-person visits. While successful, this program in our small coastal communities only scratches the surface of our state's behavioral health needs. However, there is hope. Despite considerable stigma for behavioral health care, virtual therapy more than tripled in 2020. In fact, 62% of respondents in a recent Amwell study reported that they would prefer a virtual visit for their regular mental health visits, even after it is safe to resume in-person visits. The evidence is clear: telemedicine is a viable, practical approach that provides quality access to care. It has broken down barriers and proven effective in treating the behavioral health needs of vulnerable populations. I ask that you join me in supporting House Bill 2508 to continue expanding our reach to Oregonians in need.

Sincerely,

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