



Memorandum

To: Chair Prusak, Vice-Chairs Salinas and Hayden and Members of the House Committee on Health Care

From: Marty Carty, Governmental Affairs Director, Oregon Primary Care Association
Courtney Kenney, Health Equity and Policy Manager, Oregon Primary Care Association

Date: April 6, 2021

Re: Support HB 3159

On behalf of the Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA) and Oregon's 34 community health centers, we respectfully request your support of the Data Justice Act, HB 3159.

OPCA is a non-profit organization, with a mission to support Oregon's 34 community health centers, also known as federally qualified health centers, in leading the transformation of primary care to achieve health equity for all. Community health centers deliver integrated medical, dental, and behavioral health services to **466,000—or one in 10—Oregonians**, many of whom otherwise would not be able to see a medical provider. Community health centers are providers within the CCO networks, providing care to some of Oregon's most vulnerable populations, including **one in four Oregon Health Plan members**.

Community health centers are committed to health equity for all, which will not be achievable while our systems, policies, and institutions fail to understand the communities we serve. Health inequities cause harm, trauma, illness, and death to BIPOC, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, and other underserved communities across our state. We believe in the need to heal these injustices through urgent action, including impacted communities in decision making, and the equitable redistribution of power and resources. Health inequity and disparity are preventable and addressing them provides significant cost savings to health and social systems. More importantly, addressing inequity and disparity improves health and quality of life for impacted individuals and communities.

Serving some of the most diverse patients in Oregon, health centers are not only responding to the COVID-19 pandemic but also the injustices of a broken health system that has for too long underserved communities in need. Health centers have stepped up with an increasing eye towards outreach to BIPOC, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, and other underserved communities around the state. As part of their commitment to the federal safety net, **health centers have been collecting information on patient demographics – including race/ethnicity, language, and sexual orientation – for decades** and are using that data to inform their programs and services. Unfortunately, this federal data is far from inclusive and does not accurately reflect the people who seek care at Oregon's community health centers.

We support the expansion of data collection beyond federal standards to help us better understand health inequities and to inform solutions to improve access to care for underserved communities. OPCA, like our health center members, worry that impacted communities made vulnerable across the state are largely invisible in currently available data, many of which have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Oregon health centers have seen over four times the COVID-19 positivity rate (14.6%) as the state average (3.5%) and **over eighteen times the rate for racial and ethnic minorities (63.4%)**, according to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) data as of March 12, 2021.

The passage of HB 4212 (2020) was a critical step toward improving health equity. Even in the midst of providing direct services during the global pandemic, community health centers began collecting REALD data and using it to inform care. OPCA and health centers are deeply committed to health equity and believe in the importance of understanding patient demographics to drive equitable policy and resource decision making—and **we urge you to support the Data Justice Act, HB 3159 with Representative Nosse's forthcoming amendment.**