



Memorandum

To: Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Knopp and Members of the Senate
Committee on Health Care

From: Danielle Sobel, Policy & Government Affairs Sr. Director, Oregon Primary Care
Association
Marty Carty, Government Affairs Director, Oregon Primary Care Association

Date: April 26, 2021

Re: Support HB 2508-A

On behalf of the Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA), we respectfully request your support for HB 2508-A.

OPCA is a non-profit organization, with a mission to support Oregon's 33 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**.

Oregon's community health centers have become increasingly aware of the difference telemedicine makes in improving the lives of their patients. Providers and care teams see first-hand how workforce shortages and barriers such as transportation, geography, and childcare impact access to health care for patients and their families. Telemedicine provides many benefits, especially in a state with a vast rural population like Oregon, greatly improving access to primary, dental, and behavioral health care, as well as specialty services. In addition to improving access to care for Oregonians, telemedicine improves chronic disease management and overall patient health while reducing missed appointments and more expensive forms of care such as emergency department visits.

In 2019, only 50% of Oregon community health centers offered any telemedicine visits, and those visits accounted for only 0.6% of all health center visits during that year. Since the pandemic began, 100% of Oregon health centers have offered telemedicine services. And at its peak, telemedicine visits accounted for 64% of all visits at health centers and as we have reached a new normal, health centers report the use of and demand for telemedicine accounts for 49% of all visits.

The expansion of telemedicine is one tool we can use to improve health equity. But it cannot stand alone and must be coupled with supporting policies such as interpreter services and an audio-only format to ensure that we reach into underserved populations including people in rural communities, low income, people of color, immigrants, hourly wage workers, people with chronic conditions, and people with disabilities. HB 2508-A incorporates these critical components allowing patients to access

health care in their primary language and with the device they are most comfortable with and have access to.

Community health center providers value the ability to determine through medical decision making and in collaboration with their patients the modality by which evaluation occurs. This bill ensures that providers can continue to decide when and what modality of telemedicine is warranted and when face-to-face care is necessary, based on care that would require the actual laying of hands or because of a specific procedure.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 2508-A. We believe that expanding telehealth to all Oregonians is the next step in transforming health care in Oregon, and **we respectfully urge you to vote yes on HB 2508-A because all Oregonians deserve equal access to health care.**

Oregon Primary Care Association
Leading the transformation of care to achieve health equity for all
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