



## Memorandum

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

From: Marty Carty, Government Affairs Director, Oregon Primary Care Association

Date: February 2, 2022

Re: Support for HB 4095

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On behalf of the Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA) and Oregon's community health centers, I respectfully request your support for HB 4095, which establishes the Veterans Dental Program to improve access to oral health care for veterans.

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, oral, 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 six Oregon Health Plan members**.

Oregon's community health centers serve patients who often lack adequate access to oral health care. Many suffer from untreated oral disease, and many more are at risk of oral disease, often because they don't have access to preventative oral health care and education. Providers and care teams see firsthand how barriers to oral health care can lead to **poor health outcomes** and **increased cost to the health care system**. We know that individuals who don't receive regular oral health care are at greater risk for experiencing health complications related to oral health disease and are less likely to maintain jobs and/or stable housing – all leading to downstream social and health complications.

OPCA and community health centers believe that access, education, and prevention are the ultimate keys to extending good oral health to those who don't have it. Currently, veterans have limited dental benefits making access to oral health care difficult, and often, veterans delay urgent needs. Regular dental appointments are essential in evaluating, diagnosing, preventing, or treating oral diseases, which can affect systemic health. HB 4095 is a critical step toward ensuring equitable access to oral health care is available to Oregon's veteran population.

We urge your support of HB 4095 as an opportunity to be part of an upstream solution that strengthens communities, improves health outcomes, and decreases health disparity and inequity.