

## Memorandum

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

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

Date: February 11, 2022

Re: Support HB 4035 –1

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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 4035 and the –1 amendment that will ensure hundreds of thousands of Oregonians can continue to access health care coverage after the federal COVID-19 public health emergency ends.

OPCA is a non-profit organization, with a mission to support Oregon's 34 community health centers, also known as federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), 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 Oregonians of which 40% identify as a racial or ethnic minority**. 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**

The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic led to a 13.2 percent state unemployment rate – a record number – resulting in insurance coverage losses during a time when Oregonians needed it the most. During the difficult first months of the pandemic our national leaders recognized that access to health care was fundamental to weathering COVID-19 and eventually moving past it. That is why our federal partners put Medicaid redeterminations for eligibility on hold. That means anyone enrolled in Medicaid could not lose access to their health care coverage during the pandemic. Over the last two years, Oregon's Medicaid enrollment has grown as a direct result. And today **over 95 percent of Oregonians are enrolled in health insurance** – another record number.

Today, 1.4 million Oregonians have access to comprehensive life-saving health care services through the Oregon Health Plan. Community health centers know that improving access to health care is one of the best instruments we have available to achieve more equitable health outcomes while at the same time increasing efficiency and decreasing overall costs to the health care delivery system.

We must not lose the gains we have made in health care coverage when the federal public health emergency (PHE) expires. Absent further federal action the PHE will end on April 16, 2022, forcing the Oregon Health Authority to begin a twelve-month process to redetermine the eligibility of all 1.4 million Oregonians currently enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan. This means that many will lose access to life-saving health care coverage leaving them without options to access critical health care services.

The redetermination process itself is complex, making the renewal processes a real barrier to Medicaid coverage for health center patients. For example, eligible individuals may lose their coverage if they do not respond to notices in a timely manner, understand the notices or forms they receive due to language or literacy challenges, or have stable housing arrangements. Health centers invest significant time and

resources to ensure patients are able to go through the renewal process successfully or if determined ineligible, understand the appeals process.

Oregon's usual redetermination process will likely result in a loss of health care coverage for hundreds of thousands of Oregonians – who can least afford it. For working Oregonians who earn between 138 and 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines, buying coverage on the Exchange is out of reach. These individuals and families will become uninsured and their health care needs will go unsupported. We can do better! That is why we support the proposed policy goals in HB 4035 –1 that will:

- develop and support **robust** outreach and enrollment assistance and communications to those who are at risk for losing coverage;
- ensure the maintenance of health insurance coverage for Oregonians – minimizing the risk of disruptions in coverage and care to the greatest extent possible;
- develop an affordable bridge health plan for Oregonians that allows for continuity of coverage and care for Oregonians between 138 and 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines; and
- maintain and expand on the gains Oregon has experienced in health care coverage.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for the policy concepts stated above and we hope this legislature will take bold action and adopt principles laid out in HB 4035 –1.