



To: Oregon House Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee
Date: March 1, 2023
Re: House Bill 2918

Good afternoon, Chair Nosse and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Christina Bodamer, I am the Oregon Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association, writing in support of House Bill 2918.

Policies—past and present—influence the physical, economic, cultural, and social environments of communities. They often have different and unjust outcomes in communities of color, including poorer health, lower incomes, higher medical costs, and limited opportunities for social, economic, and financial advancement.

Discriminatory policymaking is not just a thing of the past. We see evidence of it within the issues that American Heart Association prioritizes. Things such as walkable neighborhoods and safe streets, availability of safe and appealing drinking water, safe and accessible green spaces, access to healthy foods and drinks, early education programs and the ability for local governments to make decisions that best reflect their community's needs. These policies, absent a commitment to advance racial equity, can continue to create or maintain oppression and inequitable conditions for communities of color and Indigenous communities.

The Legislature has already started this work by declaring racism a public health crisis, but we need to go beyond a declaration and identify and fund specific strategies to begin addressing the crisis. New policies cannot undo the damage of structural racism and ongoing discrimination, but they can advance health and prevent future harm. When people make decisions about their health—or the health of their children—we must ensure that policies in place do not limit their options and opportunities. We need to recognize and address the ways in which policies impact communities differently, especially those most affected by structural racism.

We can and should disrupt the history—and current practice—of using policy to create harm by ensuring racial equity is centered in public policy. This means saying we acknowledge, understand, and seek to remedy an unjust system. It means showing our refusal to continue causing psychological, physical, emotional, financial, and mental harm to people solely because of the color of their skin and their cultural backgrounds.

The American Heart Association stands behind the Oregon Health Equity Task Force and its leaders from community-based organizations representing BIPOC, Tribal, and Immigrant and Refugee communities and urges your support of HB 2918 as an important step to reduce the health equity gap and taking tangible steps to ensure future policies improve, not perpetuate bad policy from the past.