



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

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All relay calls are accepted

Oregon Health Policy Board Health Equity Committee Advocacy Letter in Support of Ombuds Report Recommendations

Members of the Oregon Health Policy Board,

The OHPB Health Equity Committee (HEC) is writing to express our strong endorsement of the recommendations outlined in the 2022 end-of-year Ombuds Report released in March 2023. The Ombuds program plays a vital role in our healthcare system by daily fielding concerns and generating data-driven strategies and reporting. It is crucial that we take these recommendations seriously and integrate their feedback into policy and systems changes.

We wholeheartedly encourage the Oregon Health Authority to commit to a comprehensive approach that addresses the expressed needs of its members. Key points from the Ombuds Report, particularly the importance of closing the feedback loop and moving from Oregon Health Plan (OHP) members' concerns to system change, underscore the necessity of a robust, responsive, and accountable healthcare system, which is in turn essential to achieving the agency strategic goal of health equity by 2030.

We know that Health Equity Priority Populations (as defined in OARs 950-020-010-497) and especially people with multiple intersecting marginalized identities are more likely to be on OHP, are more likely to experience discrimination and be turned away from services. If these recommendations are not taken seriously and actions taken, it will harm Health Equity Priority Populations that experience the highest levels of inequity. For example, the report highlights that unhoused individuals are likely to seek treatment in hospital emergency departments which are ill-equipped to meet their complex physical and mental health care needs, and Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment centers are often inaccessible to people most affected by "War on Drugs" criminalization policies and barriers to behavioral health services.

Specific concerns raised in the report that are particularly relevant to the work of the health equity committee include:

1. The uplifting of member and advocate concerns, placing that feedback on equal import as concerns from legislators and media.
2. Strengthening OHA staff responses to community feedback, ensuring consistent and timely agency responses as legislative mandated.



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3. Sufficient support and investment from OHA leadership in the Ombuds program to meet those OHP member needs, and the commitment to prioritizing those needs across the agency.
4. Increasing community representation in decision making, answering the call for a sustainable member-centered approach.
5. Creating a formal governance structure for the Ombuds program and Ombuds Advisory Committee to effectively and meaningfully incorporate member lived experience and perspectives.
6. Addressing the pressing issue of inequitable access to mental health services and substance use disorder treatment through the report's recommendations:
 - a. Contracting requirements and network adequacy standards for CCOs,
 - b. Increasing behavioral health care service capacity,
 - c. Increasing home-based treatments for individuals with disabilities and behavioral health needs,
 - d. Increasing housing and residential options in least restrictive settings,
 - e. Increasing Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Health Care
 - f. Bolster *Care Coordination*, leveraging the CMS 1115 waiver's focus on coordinated access to care.

In conclusion, we urge the Oregon Health Policy Board to acknowledge the recommendations made by the Ombuds Report, including those not referenced in this letter, and actively work towards implementing these changes. By prioritizing member concerns and including diverse perspectives in policy development, we can create a more equitable and responsive healthcare system that truly meets the needs of all Oregonians and make strides to our goal of health equity by 2030.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to a productive dialogue and collaborative efforts to enhance healthcare equity and accessibility in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Katie Cox
HEC Co-chair

Bryon Lambert
HEC Co-chair

Jorge I. Ramirez Garcia, PhD
Former HEC Co-Chair