



Dear Oregon Leaders:

Oregon’s behavioral health system is in acute crisis. This system was severely compromised prior to the pandemic and now, after more than a year and a half, preexisting workforce challenges have been exacerbated and outdated reimbursement rates have not been addressed. This has resulted in an ever-growing list of program closures.

You have likely heard from several stakeholders for whom this issue is critical. This crisis has the attention and concern of our entire healthcare system, from consumers who’ve been unable to access treatment, to hospitals in desperate need of beds occupied by those requiring acute behavioral health treatment. These partners have joined together to compile a list of prioritized recommendations to prevent catastrophic reductions in access. We need the urgent support of the Oregon Health Authority, the Governor’s office, and the Legislature to both expedite the delivery of resources and provide temporary administrative relief.

As public health models predicted, we are seeing increased demand for behavioral health services and dramatically increased acuity of those who deferred care due to COVID-19. However, after a session in which substantial investments were made into behavioral health, providers have yet to see an infusion of resources because the legislative intent for the investments was to transform the behavioral health delivery system in a planful, inclusive, and long-term manner – not to address the immediate crisis at hand.

This crisis spans in-patient and outpatient settings, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, and programs offered to both adults and youth.

We have much work to do in redesigning and transforming our delivery of behavioral health to ensure it works for everyone. Yet we find ourselves in an existential crisis; if we don’t turn our attention to this first, we won’t have a system to transform.

We look forward to working together to address this urgent crisis. Thank you for your time and attention to this effort.