

Representative Sanchez and honored members of the House Committee on Behavioral Health:

My name is David Nagarkatti-Gude, MD, PhD. I am a psychiatrist living and working in Portland, and I have the privilege to serve as vice chair of Oregon's Mental Health Clinical Advisory Group (MHCAG). As you consider HB 3045, I would like to offer my perspective on the ways the work of the MHCAG can benefit the mental health of Oregonians. Please note that the views expressed here are my own, and are not meant to represent the position of any groups with which I am affiliated.

A medical provider who wants advice on treating Bipolar 1 disorder – the condition on which MHCAG has been focusing most recently – might look to practice guidelines published by the American Psychiatric Association. Unfortunately, those guidelines were published in 2002, and the evidence about best treatments has evolved substantially in the past 19 years. Those guidelines also make the assumption that all individuals who live with Bipolar disorder work with a psychiatrist, which we know is not the case. Mental Health America – a leading national nonprofit organization promoting mental health – ranked Oregon 50th out of all 50 US states in 2020 in terms of prevalence of mental illness vs access to care.

The medical providers who might be involved in somebody's mental health care have a huge range of training backgrounds – they are doctors, peer support specialists, pharmacists, physician assistants, psychologists, nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, other therapists & counselors – and their work settings span from urban emergency departments to one-room clinics. Each of these providers strives to be a healer, but it can be hard to know how best to help.

The MHCAG assembles a uniquely diverse set of perspectives, working together to offer realistic guidance on how mental health care should work here in Oregon. We come together to distill clear advice on the most evidence-supported treatment options, while consistently acknowledging that supporting somebody through a mental health challenge is not accomplished by medication alone. We cannot create new systems overnight, but we can strive to make sure that the right knowledge is available when needed.

I thank the Legislature for supporting this work, and I look forward to continuing it.