

Memorandum

To: Chair Burdick, Vice-Chair Boquist and Members of the Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue

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

Date: May 12, 2021

Re: SB 852

On behalf of the Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA), we write to express support for SB 852 and specifically the targeted investment it makes in the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) program at Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS).

OPCA is a non-profit organization, with a mission to support Oregon's 34 community health centers, also known as federally qualified health centers, 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—or one in 10—Oregonians**, many of whom otherwise would not be able to see a medical provider. Community health centers are providers within the CCO networks, providing care to some of Oregon's most vulnerable populations, including **one in four Oregon Health Plan members**.

Many of Oregon's community health centers serve patients without stable housing. Providers and care teams see firsthand how a lack of safe and affordable housing leads to poor health outcomes and increased cost to the healthcare system. Individuals who experience homelessness or housing insecurity are less likely to have access to healthy diets, be able to take medication as prescribed, and be able to maintain education and/or employment – all leading to downstream health complications. We know that social needs have a cumulative impact for the people health centers serve and direct action to resolve housing insecurity must be central to Oregon's social determinants of health strategy.

Permanent supportive housing is a critical part of the wide spectrum of affordable housing and supportive services that communities should provide, especially for individuals historically marginalized and underserved by our institutions. OHA, in collaboration with OHCS, has outlined the need for the expansion of PSH and its vital role in reducing chronic homelessness. Reducing chronic homelessness at the system level decreases misutilization of emergency services, hospital readmission rates, recurring incarcerations, and level of need for crisis intervention. Therefore, PSH will also play a significant role in the reduction of total cost drivers for the state health system and local governments. **A 2016 Center for Outcomes and Research (CORE) study of affordable housing and supports in Portland found that costs to health care systems were 14 percent lower for residents of PSH just one year after moving into affordable housing:**

- outpatient primary care utilization increased by 20 percent,
- emergency department use decreased by 18 percent, and
- residents reported that access to care improved by 40 percent and that the quality of care they received improved by 38 percent.

Community health centers use screening tools to better understand and act on their patients' social needs and to shape social determinants of health strategies for their communities. However, understanding the need is only one part of the equation. Health centers rely on community partnerships and programs, including PSH vouchers, to meet the needs of their patients. Long term rental assistance vouchers, in tandem with housing that includes case management services help to stabilize individuals and families who have struggled with housing insecurity. We support investment in long term

rental assistance vouchers using funds generated in SB 852 as an opportunity to leverage these resources for health center patients and establish partnerships between health centers and OHCS united by a common goal of achieving long term, affordable housing for patients and their families.

We believe SB 852 is an opportunity to provide additional significant investment in PSH and more specifically, support services that are critical for people couldn't successfully maintain housing otherwise. Health center patients need housing access and stability to successfully utilize health care and other services to maintain recovery, health, and wellness.