

To whom it may concern,

HIV Alliance provides HIV care and prevention in multiple counties in Oregon. We work collaboratively with partners in each county to address the factors that contribute to HIV infections and we provide wrap around services to address social determinants of health for people who are living with HIV. We are the largest provider of syringe exchange services in the Willamette Valley and along with that we offer harm reduction services designed to prevent overdose and connect folks with substance use disorder to treatment options. We are working with the HJRA on Measure 110 implementation because access to treatment and harm reduction is so critical and closely linked to HIV risk. Addiction is a health issue. Much like HIV, it requires attentive and compassionate treatment and support. People do recover however we believe that access to harm reduction services and, h long-term individualized support, are essential to recovery.

While syringe exchange effectively disrupts the transmission of HIV and HCV, the best way to reduce risk and empower those we serve is to connect them to health services, including treatment for those who are ready. It is our hope that measure 110 will lead to additional treatment resources and better access for those in greatest need. We are especially invested in the referral centers that will be newly implemented across the state. We believe that the centers should be harm reduction focused, so that they can be a bridge for folks with substance use disorder including those who might not be ready for treatment. With support, mentoring and relationship building we have seen that folks can move towards recovery. These centers can be the path to that; however, they must be able to refer to all treatment modalities and providers. They must be considered a part of the continuum of treatment and they should be required to connect individuals to services across that continuum.

Oregon is in an overdose crisis — and COVID-19 has only made it worse. OHA reported a 70% increase in overdose deaths during the spring of 2020 compared to the Spring of 2019. Addressing Oregon's addiction crisis is an important component of pandemic relief. It's not something that can be put on the back burner until after COVID-19; people are dying every day and need these services now. 2020 brought large increases across Oregon in syringe exchange utilization. Many of these new clients told us that economic hardship and other stressors had led to relapse. HIV Alliance's syringe exchange is an essential service, however seeing increases in utilization is concerning. Two out of three Oregonians know someone impacted by substance use disorder. When we lose one person to accidental drug overdose (the leading cause of preventable death in the United States for those under 50), that loss creates ripples and impacts all of us. I have never seen a year when those numbers have gone down and that is why we strongly support a new model of connecting folks to treatment.

Thank you for your time in reviewing this, and what you are doing to move Oregon forward with harm reduction services!

HIV Alliance

