

TO: Senate Committee on Health Care
FROM: Matt Newell-Ching, Public Policy Manager
RE: **Support SB 1538 to increase dental care access and decrease hunger**
DATE: February 7, 2022



Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Kennemer, and members of the committee,

At Oregon Food Bank, we often find that **when low-income Oregonians are forced to make choices between what they can and cannot afford, food is one of the places people begin to make sacrifices.** This can look like skipping meals, parents not eating so that children are able to, or just eating less than they normally would are all ways families make food stretch. Similarly, skipping dental care because they don't have coverage and the out-of-pocket costs can be prohibitive is very common, especially for low-income families.

According to the Health Policy Institute of the American Dental Association, in 2013 the average per patient spending on dental care was \$685 per year with no insurance- those numbers are even higher now when adjusted for inflation.¹ **No one in Oregon should be forced to pay the high cost of dental care and be at risk of needing to skip other necessities like food,** or go without proper dental care- which can have serious effects on their overall health.

Over the last decade, the COFA Alliance National Network (CANN) has worked tirelessly to ensure that COFA Oregonians have access to the healthcare they need, and we appreciate the efforts by the legislature to address many gaps across programs for community members. Yet gaps still remain.

That's why Oregon Food Bank supports the COFA Dental Gap Bill (SB 1538). The Bill will provide Medicaid-level dental care for those who have turned to 65 (Medicare age) but do not qualify for Medicare but because of insufficient work credits (40). This would ensure elders in our COFA communities have access to dental care. This would significantly improve the quality of life for approximately 300 community members.

We will not be able to end hunger until everyone in our state has access to affordable healthcare coverage - including dental care. We urge your support for Senate Bill 1538. Thank you for your consideration.

¹<https://healthcare.oregon.gov/Documents/COFA%20Dental%20Study%20Final%20Report%202020.pdf>

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