



Memorandum

To: Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Kennemer, and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care

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

Date: February 7, 2022

Re: Support for SB 1538

On behalf of the Oregon Primary Care Association (OPCA) and Oregon's community health centers, I respectfully request your support for SB 1538, which establishes Medicaid-level dental benefits for eligible COFA citizens living in Oregon.

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. Health centers deliver integrated primary, oral and behavioral health care services to over **466,000 Oregonians of which 40% identify as a racial or ethnic minority**. Community health centers are providers within the CCO networks, providing care to some of Oregon's most vulnerable populations, including **one in six Oregon Health Plan members**.

Oregon's community health centers serve patients who often lack adequate access to oral health care. Many suffer from untreated oral disease, and many more are at risk of oral disease, often because they don't have access to preventative oral health care and education. Providers and care teams see firsthand how barriers to oral health care can lead to **poor health outcomes** and **increased cost to the health care system**. We know that individuals who don't receive regular oral health care are at greater risk for experiencing health complications related to oral health disease and are less likely to maintain jobs and/or stable housing – all leading to downstream social and health complications.

OPCA and community health centers believe that access, education, and prevention are the ultimate keys to extending good oral health to those who don't have it. Currently, COFA citizens are eligible for Medicaid and the associated dental benefit. However, at age 65 many do not qualify for Medicare and as a result, are not eligible to purchase dental benefits under Part C. This makes access to oral health care difficult, and often, the result is that people delay urgent needs. Regular dental appointments are essential in evaluating, diagnosing, preventing, or treating oral diseases, which can affect systemic health. SB 1538 is a critical step toward ensuring equitable access to oral health care is available to Oregon's COFA population.

We urge your support of SB 1538 as an opportunity to be part of an upstream solution that strengthens communities, improves health outcomes, and decreases health disparity and inequity.