

February 2, 2022

Re: Protect Measure 110 for Peer Support and Recovery Services

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 also offer Peer Support services which are funded by Measure 110 and have been proven to reduce illicit drug use, reduce emergency visits, increase rates of employment, and increase the number of people receiving an HIV test.

While Measure 110 took longer to implement than expected, the positive results we have seen with our clients during the few months this funding has been made available has been encouraging. M110 funds are allowing us to expand our Peer Support services to areas of the state that have the most need and some of the highest rates of overdoses, including Douglas, Coos, Curry, Jackson, and Josephine counties. We know that Peer Support services work, an expansion of these services will address the impact of illicit drug use on our communities. Clients enrolled in our Prime Peer program used illicit substances an average of 8.7 days when first engaging with Peer Support; that has been reduced to an average of 6.4 days after 6 months in our program. Emergency visits were also reduced, 22% of our clients reported a visit to an emergency center because of substance use at entry and this dropped to 5% of clients at 6 months. Employment rates rose for our clients engaging with our Peer Support services. 37% of clients were employed at the time of being enrolled in the program, and this increased to 57% of clients being employed after 6 months. Rates of HIV testing also increased, from 71% of clients to 87% of clients after 6 months. Working in the HIV epidemic for over 25 years, HIV Alliance knows that to face a crisis you must use evidence-based practices, but invest deeply in them, and recognize that they may take time. This does not mean they are not worthwhile or effective.

Oregon is in an overdose crisis. OHA reported an 83% increase in overdose deaths in 2021. Two out of three Oregonians know someone impacted by substance use disorder. When we lose one person to drug overdose that loss creates ripples and impacts all of us. We strongly support protection of M110 funding for its intended purpose - to save lives and promote better health. We understand the need to fund other critical services, including those provided by our partners in the cities and counties we serve. However, we believe given time M110 will complement and enhance their efforts, if adequately funded.

We have the opportunity right now to help more Oregonians receive the support they need to achieve the health outcomes they desire. Please do not reallocate these funds just as they are being spent in our communities and having real, positive impacts.

It is critical that the Oregon Legislature continues to build upon the work that has already been done to reduce harm and support Oregonians recovering from substance use disorder by keeping Measure 110 funds dedicated to their intended purpose when voter passed the measure. Thank you for your time in reviewing this and what you are doing to move Oregon forward.

Sincerely,

Renee Yandel
Executive Director