

To: Chair Deb Patterson, Vice-Chair Cedric Hayden and Members of the Senate Healthcare Committee
From: Annette Marcus, Policy Manager, on behalf of Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide
RE: Support for SB818 – Equipping Medical providers with skills to help prevent suicide
Date: February 12, 2023

Equipping physicians and nurses with accurate information about how to identify and support a suicidal patient is one of the most effective ways to prevent suicide.

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Doctors and nurses across the country report being overwhelmed by the number of patients they are seeing with behavioral health issues including suicidality. Many nurses and doctors say they have not received adequate training in suicide assessment, lethal means counseling, and safety



The Oregon Alliance to Prevent Suicide is a statewide advisory group to the Oregon Health Authority. We are subject matter experts, state leaders, young adults, and suicide attempt and loss survivors from around the state. We work closely with local suicide prevention coalitions across the state. The role of the Alliance is to advise OHA on all matters related to youth and young adult suicide.

planning. Even when patients fill out a very basic assessment, we are hearing from people from around Oregon that doctors and nurses fail to ask them about suicidality or provide guidance on suicide prevention strategies. Unfortunately, due to the under resourced behavioral health workforce, even when a healthcare provider identifies suicide risk, they often are not able to get a patient an appointment with a therapist. This is why they not only need to know how to recognize suicide warning signs but also have skills to help patients survive, stabilize, and get support through a potential life-threatening suicidal crisis. In fact, healthcare providers themselves are at a heightened risk of suicide and need these skills to support colleagues as well.

SB818 does not mandate continuing medical education for medical professionals, rather it requires OHA to *ensure access to* the appropriate and meaningful training for healthcare providers. The goal of SB818 is to prevent suicide by increasing the number of physicians and nurses who take suicide prevention training as measured by licensing boards.

Why This Matters

- More than 60% of people who die by suicide have seen a healthcare professional in the month prior to their death. The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention concludes that equipping physicians and nurses with accurate information about how to identify and support a suicidal patient is one of the most effective ways to prevent suicide.

¹ National Strategy for Suicide Prevention



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- Most people who die by suicide had contact with the health care system in the year before their deaths – but only about one-third have received mental health services. This means that primary care and emergency room doctors, nurses and other specialists may be more often positioned to evaluate a person in crisis. (University of Washington)
- The Oregon Health Authority’s recently released *Suicide Prevention for Medical and Behavioral Health Providers* (a report initiated with 2017’s SB 48), noted that approximately 31% of Oregon Medical board licensees (physicians, physician assistants, acupuncturists) reported taking suicide risk assessment, treatment, or management training from 2019 through 2021. About 39% of nursing licensees said they took suicide prevention coursework. This is a start, but still leaves the majority of healthcare professionals without training in preventing and managing suicide.

Goal of SB818: Healthcare Providers with Skills and Confidence to Address Suicide and Save Lives

- The intention of SB818 is to create state level coordination of suicide prevention training(s) that is relevant to healthcare professionals. This is one step towards creating a healthcare workforce equipped to respond to patients considering suicide. Progress towards this goal will be measured by SB48(2017), which requires a report to be submitted to the legislature. The report, *Suicide Prevention Training for Medical and Behavioral Health Providers Report*), is submitted every two years.
- The SB818 legislation is designed to ensure easy access to a relevant and high quality training for healthcare professionals, a critical first step in equipping healthcare professionals with the skills to assess, safety plan and most importantly prevent suicide.
- We have learned through the implementation of mandated training for the behavior health sector, a coordinated statewide effort is need for a task of this magnitude. Healthcare providers have told us they do not want new mandated CMEs but they do want access to quality suicide prevention training.
- SB818 provides an essential foundation for building a training system so medical professionals can help patients struggling with suicide. Without a cohesive system to deliver training we leave the majority of physicians and nurses untrained and challenged to adequately respond to some of their most vulnerable patients.

Please join us in supporting passage of SB818



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