

February 7, 2025



Good afternoon Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and members of the Committee,

My name is Barry Taylor, and I am a licensed general dentist and the Executive Director of the Oregon Dental Association, which represents almost 2000 dentists across the state. I also serve on the Oregon Wellness Program's Executive Committee. I am here today on behalf of the ODA to express our support for SB 531, which would provide \$1.6 million in funding for the Oregon Wellness Program.

As you know, the Oregon Wellness Program provides three free, confidential counseling sessions annually to medical and dental providers across the state. These sessions are available immediately and are non-reported. This important program allows medical and dental providers to seek the help they need without jeopardizing their ability to practice.

I am speaking today on behalf of our membership, as well as sharing my own personal story. I have used the services of the Oregon Wellness Program on my own behalf, and I can speak to the advantages of having it readily available. Many years ago, I had a major depressive episode and am fortunate to have received excellent care during that time. Having said that, I still have occasional bouts of depression, and it was during one of these acute events recently that I reached out to the Oregon Wellness Program (OWP). Instead of facing an additional challenge of finding the right counselor who would be covered by my insurance and would be available for a conversation within days, I was able to access the OWP and had an appointment scheduled within days with a counselor who I could trust because they had been vetted by the Oregon Wellness Program. I also didn't have to worry if the provider was on my insurance company panel. The OWP was there for me in a moment of distress, and the few appointments covered through this program for providers like me helped me get back on a healthy track.

From the anecdotal stories I have heard from colleagues, there are many reasons why this program is critical for the healthcare community. For some, the program is there as an option to begin receiving treatment without fear of it being reported on their insurance. Others may be in a crisis and the program is a great resource that they can be pointed to. Others may be overwhelmed, and the program offers access with no barriers and is easily accessible.

There is plenty of peer reviewed evidence which documents the increased stress, burnout, and mental health crisis that is affecting healthcare workers. This takes a toll on patient care when providers miss days of work, leave clinical positions, are not at their best at work, or leave the profession all together. The Oregon Wellness Program is a very important tool that supports our healthcare workforce so they can get the care they need to continue to serve and treat their own patients across Oregon.

The Oregon Dental Association strongly supports SB 531 and urges the legislature to allocate \$1.6 million in funding to the Oregon Wellness Program.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Barry J. Taylor'.

Barry Taylor, DMD, CAE
Executive Director, Oregon Dental Association