

Submitter: Bob Snyder
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Early Childhood and Behavioral Health
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB691

I urge you to pass SB 691. Historically pregnant people who use substances have been treated poorly and deeply fear being honest about their substance use. They fear losing their children and facing legal consequences, so they hide until they must deliver. If these pregnant people don't feel safe asking for help, they will continue to use and have poor outcomes including medical complications for themselves and their infants, minimal medical care during pregnancy, CPS involvement, significantly higher medical costs (including NICU stays), and likely additional trauma for their families.

BestCare is a large behavioral health provider in Deschutes, Crook and Jefferson County, providing outpatient for substance abuse and mental health services, residential treatment, detox, and addiction medicine clinic. We have had a Nurture Oregon program in Deschutes County since 2021. Through creating a team of people who have lived experience, BestCare's Nurture program provides tailored behavioral health services to meet the needs of these expecting parents. This includes making specialized treatment plans to meet the needs of the pregnancy and the participant's substance use disorder, providing parenting classes, pregnancy and new parent support groups, and creating a safe (destigmatized) space to give them the support they deserve. We see significant positive outcomes from offering services specialized for this population.

Our Nurture Oregon team in Deschutes County has received referrals for 175 pregnant people with substance use during pregnancy in the past three years and has served 110 of them. We've helped many families address their substance use disorder during pregnancy so that they were able to deliver substance-free infants and avoid additional medical care for withdrawal-related concerns. We have helped families address safety concerns and avoid CPS removals.

Because we have clinics in the tri-country area (Deschutes Crook and Jefferson) we extend our Nurture services to those rural counties as well. Before Nurture Oregon services, BestCare was providing outreach services for pregnant clients on a limited basis. This work was limited because of funding/staffing issues, continued stigma, and limited coordination between support services.

Being in a rural area we have one birthing center with a NICU and only two clinics to choose from for obstetrics care, so we work together with medical providers and the community to change the outcomes for these people. When starting the Nurture Oregon in Deschutes, providers often told our team "I don't work with those patients"

or “We don’t screen people for substance use” which supported a false belief that pregnant people with substance use disorder were not a community in need. But they were working with those patients, their pregnancy or need to treat for substance use flew under the radar. We have broken down significant barriers for our Nurture Oregon participants and the community is now working together more than ever before. We have a long-standing relationship with the hospital in our area St Charles Medical Center. We have created patient-centered partnerships with St. Charles Center for Women’s Health, East Cascade Women’s Group, St Charles Family Birthing Center, where we work together to help our shared patients.

BestCare’s Nurture Oregon program has made a valuable difference in the lives of so many and we must continue this work for the health and well-being of our communities. Please pass SB 691 so this important work can continue and be expanded.