



AN OPEN LETTER

October 24, 2019

The Honorable Kate Brown
Governor of Oregon
The State Capitol
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Governor Brown:

We are writing to respectfully urge you to take action now to end Oregon's untreated addiction crisis by fully implementing the new blueprint for an addiction recovery continuum of care, soon to be released by the state Alcohol & Drug Policy Commission (ADPC). Should the ADPC not meet the Legislatures request for a comprehensive plan by December, Oregon Recovers, in partnership with stakeholders across the state, will offer its own comprehensive blueprint for a new system of care.

Our communities are locked in the throes of one of the worst public health crises in Oregon's history resulting in an average of five alcohol-related deaths and 1-2 drug overdoses each day—a fatality rate 700% higher than the worst year of the AIDS epidemic. As you well know, untreated addiction is the leading contributor to our overwhelmed foster care system, our homelessness crisis, and our packed prisons. It is connected to the education gap and drop-out rates, it is the largest cost driver in our healthcare system, and it is a contributor to the high utilization of social services. The high human toll aside, the combined cost of untreated addiction in Oregon is at least \$5.9 billion annually.

This crisis exists because Oregon has always lacked a fully integrated addiction recovery continuum of care. While in recent years some local communities have made positive progress in increasing access to treatment, the absence of a statewide plan has resulted in a system that is fractured at best. Indeed, despite a 59% increase in public spending on addiction over the last 10 years, Oregon is ranked by the federal government as last in access to treatment while also suffering from the 4th highest addiction rate in the nation.

Recovery is the pathway towards a brighter future for every Oregonian, especially for under-resourced communities of every identity and political ideology. Recovery reunites

families; elevates people into housing, employment, and higher education; increases economic productivity; reduces health care costs, and most importantly -- saves lives.

Eighteen months ago, the recovery community was honored to stand with you when you declared addiction had reached the level of a public health crisis. On that day, you directed the long-dormant Alcohol & Drug Policy Commission (ADPC) to craft a new blueprint for a recovery-oriented system of care which:

- fully integrates evidence-based **prevention** with cultural congruence for tribal and communities of color
- creates a new paradigm for **intervention** outside of the criminal justice system
- offers **treatment** to whoever needs it, when they need it regardless of who pays
- invests in robust post-treatment **recovery support**
- recognizes the **cultural needs** of communities of color, LGBT people, people with disabilities including folks that live with a mental health diagnosis, and rural Oregonians that have for too long been denied access to a full continuum of care.

Since that day, Oregon Recovers and its partners have actively worked to ensure broad stakeholder input in, and support of, the ADPC strategic planning process. Over the last six weeks, seven of Oregon's largest cities and counties have adopted proclamations reinforcing your 2018 declaration that untreated addiction is a significant public health crisis while also articulating support for the ADPC planning process. At least five more local governments are expected to follow suit before the end of the year.

The plan to be delivered in December is not a quick fix requiring just one piece of legislation. The construction and implementation of a modernized statewide, comprehensive continuum of care will require a multi-year campaign that successfully advances state and federal regulatory changes and as well as state and federal legislation. As Governor, we need you to lead that process.

Specifically, we respectfully **request an immediate meeting with you** to discuss why we would like you to take the following actions:

1. **Convene & Fund Stakeholders to Design an Implementation Campaign.** As a result of Oregon Recovers two years of organizing, multiple organizations (many with government relations staff), private corporations, elected officials and community leaders are prepared to join forces and collaborate on a multi-year effort to implement the ADPC plan. All are looking for you to lead this unprecedented effort at creating a new system of care.
2. **Appoint a Recovery Czar.** Currently, there are too many sous chefs but no master chef. Responsibility for implementing the ADPC plan is distributed across multiple agencies and organizations, significantly diminishing the most important component of building a new system: accountability. We urge you to appoint one person with broad authority to manage the implementation of the ADPC plan over the next two years.

3. **Prioritize Addiction in the Short 2020 Session.** Combatting addiction and supporting recovery has clear bipartisan support and, increasingly, unprecedented political will within the legislature. The purpose of the short session is to address emergencies that cannot wait to be addressed in the next regular session. The addiction crisis is just such an emergency. While we don't expect all the changes needed to be addressed, there are fundamental aspects of the ADPC plan that, if implemented, will immediately save lives.

4. **Utilize the Bully Pulpit.** The significant systems change needed to end the addiction crisis in Oregon will not occur if we don't simultaneously address the culture change needed within the medical community, our criminal justice system and the public at large. Stigma against people suffering from addiction is the primary reason our healthcare system has not embraced the changes needed to end the current crisis and is the primary reason individuals don't pursue help until the consequences of their untreated addiction are personally destructive and often criminal. As Governor, you have a platform that affords you the opportunity to repeatedly and effectively to challenge outdated assumptions and promote change.

Governor Brown, on August 28th you declared September National Recovery Month and eloquently wrote: "For Oregonians, recovery is a path to reaching their full potential, health, and wellness throughout their life span."

Sadly, the current system of care fails to offer too many Oregonians a path to that promise. But with your engaged, forceful and decisive leadership, we can collectively change that. The ADPC (or Oregon Recovers), with broad input from providers and recovery community members alike, will shortly deliver to you a comprehensive plan to end the current crisis. We implore you to embrace this new blueprint and to use the full power of your office to implement it immediately. Every day delayed means more people will lose their lives, more children will be stored in our overwhelmed foster care system, more young people will view their future from a jail cell and more Oregonians will end up in a tent on the street.

Please, Governor Brown, take action now.

Respectfully,

Se-ah-dom Edmo, Executive Director
MRG Foundation

Tony Vezina, Executive Director
4th Dimension Recovery Center

Mercedes Elizalde, Public Policy Director
Central City Concern

Monta Knudson, Executive Director
Bridges to Change

Andrew Rowe, Executive Chairman
AllMed Healthcare Management, Inc

Eric Martin
MHACCBO

Teri Morgan, Program Coordinator
Springfield Treatment Center

Mike Marshall, Executive Director
Oregon Recovers

Susan Steward, Executive Director
Building Owners & Managers Assoc. (BOMA)

Autumn Brown MS, Owner
Recovery BLVD
Portland Sober Living Company

Dr. Ben Schwartz, CEO
Recovery Works NW

Joan Ayala
Orenda Counseling Services

Laura Vences, Co-Founder
Caminos Diferentes

Steve Sanden, Executive Director
Bay Area First Step

Brent Canode, Executive Director
Alano Club of Portland

Julia Jackson, Executive Director
Columbia Community Mental Health

Jason Umtuch, Ambassador
Wellbriety Of Oregon

Janie Guilickson, Executive Director
Mental Health & Addiction Assoc.

Johnnie Gage, Executive Director
The Miracles Club (Interim)
Stay Clean Inc.

David Eisen, Executive Director
Quest Center for Integrative Health

Kitty Martz, Treasurer
Voices of Problem Gambling Recovery

Solara Paschal MA, Owner
Recovery BLVD

Jeff Blackford, Executive Director
C.H.A.N.C.E.

Doyal Smith, Executive Director
Dual Diagnosis Anonymous of Oregon

Abigail Wells, Coalition Director
Northwest Family Services