



September 2, 2021

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

Dear Governor Brown:

We want to applaud you for the continued leadership you have shown in addressing Oregon's COVID-19 crisis. We are writing to ask you to address Oregon's other, even more fatal health emergency: the addiction crisis. Since the onset of the pandemic, Oregon Health Authority projections<sup>1</sup> (based on pre-covid data) suggest that more than 3360 Oregonians have lost their lives due to alcohol and other drugs. Given the spike in overdose deaths and alcohol related emergency room visits, it's fair to say 3360 is a very conservative number. Comparatively, there have been 3033 Covid deaths during the same time frame.

Oregon is gripped in the throes of a rapidly deteriorating substance use emergency due to a dramatic decline in individuals willing to work within the substance use system of care. Combined with the behavioral health crisis Oregon faced prior to the pandemic, the addiction recovery system workforce is straining to a breaking point with the increase in demand and, ironically, with the infusion of significant resources. The measures taken in the last legislative session are a step in the right direction, but the slow implementation of resources is causing system failure.

There is a clear and present danger to the system that demands your immediate action. There are at least a dozen SUD programs shutting down. These include *YES House Adolescent SUD Residential Program*, *Bridge to Pathways 3.7 Withdrawal Management*, *LifeWorks NW Mountindale SUD Residential Program for Moms and Kids* and frankly every program over the state with more than 100 employees. Many of these are rolling and temporary closures as staff shrinks and remaining staff are temporarily shifted to other programs. This is on top of COVID related reductions in program size for social distancing that have existed since march of 2020. Our adolescent system is nearly decimated.

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the pandemic, OHA estimated that there are six alcohol related deaths each day in Oregon and 1-2 drug overdose deaths.

We need you to take immediate executive action to address this emergency:

1. Declare Oregon's behavioral health staffing crisis a state emergency.
2. To support the current OHA staff and their efforts to support the workforce emergency, charging the director of behavioral health to develop and manage and bear responsibility utilizing both OHA financial and administrative capacities to address the emergency.
3. Direct OHA to utilize SAMHSA criteria to develop concrete, measurable numeric goals for the building and strengthening of the BH workforce (see attached SAMSHA BH workforce report)
4. Direct OHA to immediately create a workforce development retention plan which includes an immediate increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates for SUD treatment and recovery services.
5. Direct OHA to immediately create a workforce development recruitment plan which is aligned with the goals established in #3 and which includes a waiver of certification costs for 2 years and a school loan forgiveness program.
6. Utilize the power of your office to acknowledge and thank the BH workforce as they face this unprecedented challenge.

Governor Brown, to end this crisis Oregon needs visible, passionate leadership. We urge you to prioritize Oregon's rapidly exploding behavioral health emergency and take immediate action.

Sincerely,

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Oregon Recovers

Dwight Holton  
Chief Executive Officer  
Lines for Life

Eric Martin  
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