

January 4, 2021

Health Policy and Analytics Medicaid Waiver Renewal Team
Attn: Michelle Hatfield
500 Summer St. NE, E65
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Ms. Hatfield:

Re: Comments in Support of Medicaid 1115 Demonstration Application

Willamette Partnership supports the Medicaid 1115 Demonstration Application because it advances equitable health investments and community-driven health values. In particular, the [Focused Equity Investments](#) are an opportunity for Oregon to champion community-led investments that address social determinants of health. We know that zip code impacts health outcomes, and increasing access to green space, job opportunities, education, housing, etc. in addition to quality health care coverage is a critical step towards equitable health for all communities. Due to a long history of racialized policies, [race continues to be the strongest predictor of someone being exposed to environmental health hazards](#), and focusing on priority communities begins to repair past discrimination and exclusion from health investment decisions.

Past investments in health and social infrastructure have often been deeply inequitable in their benefits, costs, and negative impacts. For the communities that live with these inequities - Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), low-income, and rural communities, as well as older people and people with disabilities - historical social infrastructure disinvestment has led to critical failures, undermining public health, community resiliency, and economic development. The new Medicaid waiver allows for community agency and flexibility, giving impacted communities the room and power to identify and determine where investments need to be made to improve community health.

We believe in moving healthcare money into community hands, where investing in natural spaces is an option. This is particularly important in a changing climate, where natural infrastructure needs to be incorporated into built infrastructure so that our communities are climate-ready and more resilient to fires, flooding, and water quality and quantity issues. The 1115 Demonstration Application will move money to community wellness programs and communities can choose to invest in green spaces and natural infrastructure as one option among many. We are hopeful that this opens up more pathways for natural infrastructure, green spaces, and outdoor recreation to treat mental health and substance use, as it is currently not accessible to all.

Willamette Partnership is looking to make real impacts in communities that improve health and environmental outcomes, especially for communities that have experienced inequities. The new approach to Medicaid can help strengthen new and existing community projects, create and strengthen cross-sectoral partnerships, increase capacity and technical assistance to community partners, and offer collaborative facilitation in projects at the intersection of health and the environment. For a stronger, healthier, and just future for Oregon, leaders should adopt the thoughtful Medicaid Waiver Renewal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara O'Brien', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sara O'Brien
Executive Director
Willamette Partnership
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