



January 7, 2022

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

Dear Ms. Hatfield:

On behalf of REI Co-op, this is to endorse and amplify comments submitted in this matter by Bobby Cochran of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership. REI is an 84-year-old co-op dedicated to the proposition that time in, and access to, nature are fundamental to individual and societal well-being. We have a substantial presence in Oregon, with 800,000 members, 8 stores, 600+ employees and some 60+ vendor-partners. More relevant to this inquiry, REI has recommitted itself to promoting greater justice, equity and belonging in the nation's and each state's natural spaces.

How does this relate to public health? As OHA's concept paper on equity notes, "the evidence linking time outdoors with better mental health and social cohesion is substantial" (p. 15). REI is proud to have supported research that provides some of that evidence. Among the more telling conclusions is this:

According to the best available evidence, nature contact offers considerable promise in addressing a range of health challenges, including many, such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, depression, and anxiety, that are public health priorities. Nature contact offers promise both as prevention and as treatment across the life course. Potential advantages include low costs relative to conventional medical interventions, safety, practicality, not requiring dispensing by highly trained professionals, and multiple co-benefits. Few medications can boast these attributes.

"Nature Contact and Human Health: A Research Agenda," Howard Frumkin, et al., 31 July 2017, CID: 075001, <https://doi.org/10.1289/EHP1663>.

Mr. Cochran's observation is straightforward. As laid out in the draft Waiver Renewal, yes, delivering on OHA's equity goals will require addressing climate equity and resilience in under-served communities. The health effects of climate change are only growing more apparent and severe. But notably, there is preventative investment that can serve ***both*** the state's health and climate interests; namely, increasing the amount of, and access to, greenspace can ameliorate the impact of climate change both on the planet and on people's health. As Mr. Cochran suggests, this element of the community health equation can be addressed by adding to the Waiver's list of Climate Supports the simple goal of "increasing access to natural areas with shade." Per the Frumkin et al. paper, providing such nature-access – especially in under-served communities – can readily deliver multiple, meaningful co-benefits.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Marc Berejka
Director, Community Advocacy & Impact