



Feb. 19, 2021

**Oregon Community Health Centers to Receive Direct COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution in State and Federal Efforts To Ensure Greater Access and Equity for Oregonians:  
Statement from Joan Watson-Patko, Executive Director  
Comments made at Gov. Kate Brown's Press Conference on Feb. 19, 2021**

Good morning, I'm Joan Watson-Patko, the executive director of the Oregon Primary Care Association, a nonprofit membership association of Oregon's 33 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), also known as Community Health Centers (CHCs).

First, I want to thank Gov. Kate Brown, Director Pat Allen, and the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) for their inclusion of community health centers in COVID-19 response planning, ensuring greater access and equity in testing and vaccination as community health centers serve populations throughout Oregon that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Oregon's community health centers are nonprofit systems of care providing integrated medical, dental, and behavioral health services to 466,000 Oregonians at over 270 sites across our state.

Health centers are trusted sources of quality community-based care, and are uniquely positioned to assist in vaccinating vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities across the state, including people experiencing homelessness and poverty, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), agricultural and migrant farm workers, and people living in rural and frontier communities.

Oregon's health centers have seen COVID-19 positivity rates of 18% among their patients, which is almost four times the COVID-19 state average positivity rate of 4.6%. For racial and ethnic minorities in Oregon this positivity rate jumps to over 15 times the state average of 71.3%.

Oregon's community health centers are already hard at work vaccinating their communities and are ready and eager to increase access in partnership with our state and federal government.

Vaccines have started to arrive at a handful of Oregon community health centers throughout the state, including Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center. In the coming weeks we will see an increase in available vaccine to health centers through our county, state, and federal partners. These programs will complement each other to provide increased equity in vaccine rollout.

OPCA and our member health centers look forward to continuing to work with Governor Brown, the OHA, and the federal government to mount a more equitable comprehensive vaccination program in the state that will remove barriers for those most severely impacted by COVID-19.

**About Oregon's CHCs**

Oregon's community health centers deliver integrated medical, dental, and behavioral health services at over 200 locations to the communities made vulnerable across the state. Over 466,000 Oregonians receive their care at a community health center, including one in four people on the Oregon Health Plan. Over 73% of patients live below the poverty line, and 94% live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. Over 75% of community health centers have clinic sites serving rural communities, 30% of Oregon's community health centers are federally recognized as Health Care for the Homeless locations, and 33% are designated as Migrant Health Centers. Find out more about [Oregon's CHCs here](#).

**About OPCA**

OPCA is a non-profit membership association of Oregon's 33 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), including one FQHC Look-Alike. FQHCs are also known as community health centers (CHCs). The organization's mission is to lead the transformation of primary care to achieve health equity for all.

OPCA believes all people, in Oregon and beyond, should have the chance to lead their healthiest lives and have access to equitable health care. Oregon Primary Care Association supports a network of community health centers that deliver exceptional health care to people in urban, rural and frontier communities who may otherwise not have access to services. By helping health centers apply innovative approaches to health care delivery and system challenges, OPCA is transforming primary care in Oregon and beyond. Follow us on Twitter [@OregonPCA](#) or on [Facebook](#)