

State Government

Lawmakers invest in behavioral health

Oregon's legislative assembly adjourned March 4 without much political rancor and with historic investments in Oregon's behavioral health workforce and a new health care plan to cover more low-income Oregonians.

[House Bill 4004](#) directs the Oregon Health Authority to administer a grant program to allow behavioral health care providers to retain staff through increasing staff compensation, wages, benefits, and bonuses. The bill targets \$132 million to behavioral health providers that deliver treatment and services across OHA, DHS, and [OYA](#). The Bill allocates grant dollars to providers serving Oregon's publicly funded system and requires that providers spend 75% of their any grant dollars directly on wages. Allowable uses for the remaining portion include workforce retention efforts such as benefits, bonuses, and working condition improvement.

State moves to expand health care access

Currently, Oregon has 1.4 million people enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) which has seen a boom in enrollments during the pandemic to the tune of 300,000. Under the current federal public health emergency, Medicaid redeterminations for eligibility have been put on hold. This means that during the pandemic, anyone enrolled in Medicaid could not lose access to that health care coverage. As a result, **Oregon has the lowest ever uninsured rate in state history**. And the numbers are stark for people of color. For example, the **uninsured numbers in the African American community have dropped from 8.2 to 5 percent**.

[House Bill 4035](#) creates a new health care plan to cover up to 300,000 Oregonians whose income is too high to qualify for Medicaid yet are still considered low-income. The Bill sets up a bridge plan to provide health insurance for this group (OHA estimates 70-90 thousand people) who typically churn on and off of Medicaid as their income fluctuates.

The public health emergency is currently scheduled to **expire on April 16, 2022**. The federal government may extend the public health emergency, but that timeline is uncertain. When the public health emergency expires, the OHA and Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) will have twelve months to redetermine the eligibility of all 1.4 million Oregonians currently enrolled in Medicaid to affirm their eligibility.

Federal Update

CMS signals interest in adjusting GFE rules to better fit CHCs

On February 24, PCAs met with CMS staff to discuss the impact of the new Good Faith Estimate rule on health centers. During that listening session, CMS appeared reluctant to fully exempt health centers from GFE requirements. However, they clearly understood that the rules are more burdensome for CHCs than other provider types, and expressed interest in exploring how to adjust them to fit better with the CHC model and patients.

Capitol Hill

Congress in recess April 11-22

Both the House and Senate are scheduled to be home for Spring recess during the weeks of April 11 and April 18. This is an excellent opportunity for CHCs to invite their Senators and Representatives to visit their sites, to see first-hand the excellent work that they are doing.

Planning to have your member of Congress tour your health center during recess? Let [OPCA's Policy Team know](#). We can help with talking points and other support.

Congressional appropriations process begins to take shape

On March 18, House Appropriations Committee Chair Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) sent an FY23 [Dear Colleague](#) letter to House Members. The letter states that Members have from April 4 to the end of the month to submit up to fifteen requests for FY23 community project funding or earmarks. Chair DeLauro set a [deadline](#) of April 27, 2022, for the programmatic requests – such as the annual health center letter – for the Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee. Senate Appropriations Chair Patrick Leahy (D-VT) set a [deadline](#) of May 25, 2022, for both programmatic and earmark requests for the Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee.

White House

Biden Administration releases budget

On March 28, the Biden Administration released its FY23 budget request, kicking off the annual budget cycle. The budget included a **\$90 million increase to the health center program**, with much of that going towards a new initiative to embed early childhood development experts in health centers. The administration also included a **\$50 million increase to the Ending HIV Epidemic** to support participation from an additional 100 health centers. Notably, the budget only included a reference to President Biden's commitment to double the federal investment in the health center program.