



Public Testimony to the Oregon Health Policy Board
on the Oregon Health Improvement Plan Committee's
Draft Goals and Recommendations
July 13, 2010

Thank you for the opportunity to present some comments on the draft goals and recommendations of the Oregon Health Improvement Plan (HIP) Committee as presented to the Board today. I am unable to attend in person because I am out of state this week, so I have asked my legislative assistant, Alex Berke, to read these remarks for the record.

I would like to start by thanking the HIP Committee members – especially the chair and vice-chair, Dean Tammy Bray and Lila Wickham – for their hard work over the last several months. I know the committee has been meeting at least twice a month since March and they have conducted a series of public listening sessions across the state. I know you are all volunteering your time on top of everything else you do, so thank you for your time and energy on this important task.

I think the work of the HIP Committee is a critical piece of taking the next big steps in containing health care costs in Oregon and truly moving the dial on improving the health of every Oregonian. It picks up where the Oregon Health Fund Board's recommendations left off in terms of honing in on the public health strategies we need to employ to encourage health, prevent illness, and properly manage chronic health conditions.

Because I think this work is so important, I feel compelled to weigh in on the draft goals and recommendations contained in the presentation that I reviewed online prior to this meeting. I hope this critique is taken in the spirit in which it is given – that is, with the hope that we can be bolder, sharper, and more innovative in our efforts, while also recognizing the current constraints of Oregon's budget situation. I expect some pushback, but I hope my comments stimulate some discussion.

In general, I was hoping for more targeted goals with achievable recommendations. I believe the charge of the committee was to identify evidence-based interventions to promote population health and recommend strategies to interconnect these interventions with the health care delivery system. The goals presented are too high-level and aspirational. I would like to see us do specific things over the next five years that will improve the lives of people, directly and concretely. We don't really need more visioning or planning. We need action steps.

On the goals and recommendations themselves, I have the following feedback:

Goal 1 – Health equity and population health is achieved by improving social and economic factors. I absolutely agree with this statement. But the recommendations assigned to this goal don't get us there. For example, if you were to keep this goal, the evidence suggests that one of the best things we could do is provide more access to



affordable, healthy housing for vulnerable populations. Instead, the first recommendation calls for appointing a health equity council. I would rather see specific directions to the Oregon Health Authority to institute enforceable health equity performance measures on all state-funded services. If we don't have the expertise in the Oregon Health Authority or on the HIP Committee to start this work, a Governor-appointed council will simply add more meetings to the equation. The second recommendation calls for legislation requiring health impact assessments and remediation plans for all publicly funded building and transportation projects. While there is some merit to this idea, to what end do we pursue this tactic? What will it do to improve people's health in the next two years, in the next four years? Is this the most urgent aspect of reducing health disparities?

Goal 2 – Oregon public and private entities significantly invest in prevention and public health. My reaction to this goal was "Of course we should, but what does this mean?" The first two recommendations call for increased funding for public health and national accreditation for all counties and the state public health division. These are both fine objectives, but the former seems tone deaf to the fiscal health of the state, particularly over the next two biennia, and the latter doesn't translate into something that will immediately help people. If we are trying to achieve something in the short-term, I would suggest our efforts be focused on maximizing existing resources, eliminating underperforming efforts, and emphasizing better ways to do prevention within our budget constraints. I would guess the funding recommendation will be accompanied by some revenue ideas, but in this political climate, asking for new money needs to be backed up with specific ideas of how to help people and help the state. Earmarking new revenues, as suggested in the third recommendation, will be challenging at best. Lastly, requiring agencies to implement and monitor wellness policies is a promising path, but perhaps it's best incorporated with how employees utilize their PEBB benefits.

Goal 3 – Make chronic disease prevention and health improvement a local priority throughout the state and actively supported by communities. Again, an excellent vision statement, but the recommendations call for more planning and meetings. What exactly do we want to happen around chronic disease prevention? The third recommendation, about linking resources to having a plan to implement strategies around health equity sounds promising, but I would be more exact and say you'll get funded if you can show you are reducing health disparities.

Goals 4, 5 and 6 – reducing obesity, reducing tobacco use/exposure, and supporting people managing their chronic diseases – are the things I would like to know more about. Those are the kinds of specific goals I would preference over the first three.

Finally, a comment about the proposed population health measures: I like the work I see on these. It seems to me, though, that these metrics should be the starting point. What are we trying to achieve? Then, what are the steps to get there? And, finally, how do we implement those steps?

The big question for me is this: How will we make Oregonians healthier over the next five years through the work of the HIP Committee goals and recommendations? That seems like the question to keep front and center as we move forward.

Thank you for entertaining my comments.