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LC 216: Ensuring High Quality Health Care in Oregon

Consistent and accurate inspections and licensing of health care facilities are needed to ensure safe and high-quality care and services, but lack of resources makes this increasingly difficult.

Decades of flat funding puts Oregon's health care safety at risk

When someone visits a health care facility, they should expect to improve their health, not harm it. But sometimes unintentional errors missed oversight, inadequate sanitation, improper procedures, or poor internal communications create serious health risks for patients and employees.

The purpose of Oregon Health Authority's (OHA) health care licensing is to ensure safe, high-quality care in Oregon. Since 2009, legislative actions have expanded OHA's health care-related licensing work. These efforts are supported through licensing fees and are essential for access to safe health care for all people in Oregon, regardless of who they are and where they live. All of the licensing programs listed below are funded solely by license fees, with the exception of In-home Care Agency licensing which is mostly fees and supplemented with General Fund.

However, rising costs, inflation and greater regulatory complexity mean current fees no longer cover the costs of overseeing the safety of health care settings and services. Some programs in this area have not had a fee increase in nearly 20 years. Limited resources reduce OHA's ability to investigate patient complaints promptly and thoroughly, inspect facilities regularly, issue new licenses quickly, and provide technical assistance to licensees.

The following OHA licensing programs are most impacted by rising costs and expanding responsibilities:

Ambulatory Surgery Centers (ASC)

Licensed ASCs offer a convenient and often less expensive alternative to hospital-based surgeries for lower risk patients who do not need hospital-level care.

In recent years, state law added new regulatory requirements. Also, the complexity of services provided at ASCs has increased along with the number of complaint investigations.

Outpatient Renal Dialysis Facilities (ORDF)

ORDFs play a critical role managing patients' chronic kidney failure, extending life while supporting patient independence and quality of life. More than 100,000 Americans start receiving dialysis each year. There are about 5,300 patients with kidney failure currently receiving dialysis services in Oregon. There are currently 70 ORDF's licensed and regulated by the OHA.

In Home Care Agencies (IHCA)

IHCAs enable individuals to remain in their homes while receiving essential support that promotes their independence, dignity and well-being.

The IHCA program has seen a steady increase in workload, including more licensee turnover (147 initial licenses issued and 62 agencies closed between 2017 and 2025, technical assistance requests especially for new license applicants), inspection and complaint investigations, and enhanced enforcement cases for serious non-compliance.

Caregiver Registries (CGR)

CGRs help the public find in-home caregivers that have the right education, skills and training to meet client needs.

Demand for home care is expected to grow sharply. A November 2023 report from the Service Employee International Union estimates that Oregon will need 10,000 additional caregivers by 2030 to meet increasing demand.

Non-Transplant Anatomical Research and Recovery Organizations (NARRO)

NARRO's provide an alternative for families whose loved ones wish to donate their body for research and educational purposes. Licensing protects public health by ensuring the quality and ethical handling of these anatomical research materials.

License fees must reflect the true costs to protect Oregonians

The fees to support these programs do not support the technology and staff needed to keep pace with regulatory demands. To sustain existing service levels and ensure patient safety, licensing fees must be increased.

This proposal will increase fees by 3 to 6.5 times the current fee, depending on the program. These fees will enable OHA to meet the demands of modern health licensing requirements, including:

- Providing outreach and technical assistance to licensees
- Maintaining an online licensing system
- Publicly posting inspection and investigation outcomes, performance dashboards, and updated public-facing complaint submission tools, and
- Offering education and training to help facilities complete licensing faster, so they can open and offer services sooner, improving access to care.

Answering questions from the community and sharing more information about enforcement helps patients and the public understand their health care options and what services their communities need. Reviewing and resolving complaints quickly improves health and safety outcomes, ensuring that patients and families – especially those in underserved communities – benefit fully and equally from regulatory protections.

For more information:

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