

**Memorandum**

**To:** Metrics and Scoring Committee; and Health Plan Quality Metrics Committee

**From:** Medicaid Advisory Committee

**Date:** February 12, 2020

**Subject:** Adopting the Health Equity measure: *meaningful language access to culturally responsive health care services*

On behalf of the Medicaid Advisory Committee (MAC), we are writing to support the proposed Health Equity measure, *meaningful language access to culturally responsive health care services*, for inclusion in the Health Plan Quality Metrics Committee's 2021 menu of measures and in the 2021 CCO Incentive Metrics Program.

The MAC is federally mandated to advise on the policies, procedures, and operations of the Oregon's Medicaid program that affect enrollees and their families. Our membership comprises health care consumers, Medicaid members, physicians, representatives of Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs) and other health care organizations. We are Oregonians who experience the Medicaid system first-hand, and we understand the importance of the CCO Incentive Metrics Program. What gets measured matters; CCOs and providers direct valuable time and resources to improve on the measures that are incentivized.

During the first round of CCO contracts, metrics focused on the clinical delivery of services. While MAC understands the importance of quality clinical health services, we also know that the ability of members to access these services in their own language is paramount. Across Oregon, immigrant, non-English speaking, and deaf or hard of hearing communities face inequitable access to care and worse health outcomes. In many CCOs, these communities make up a small percentage of members and are thus overlooked. Measuring and incentivizing *meaningful language access to culturally responsive health care services* allows CCOs and providers to reallocate resources in order to better serve Oregonians.

Health equity is a core value of the MAC, OHA, the Oregon Health Policy Board, and its committees. Our health care system has historically been designed by and for the dominant culture; and traditional or standard measures have been designed to measure that system. Here in Oregon, we

have done much to transform the Medicaid delivery system – as demonstrated by our innovative CCO model and measurement program. To meaningfully uphold a value of health equity requires that we continue to push the edges of transformation and that we do things differently than have historically been done.

We understand that Governor Brown has requested the Metrics and Scoring Committee to prioritize transformational metrics that align with CCO 2.0 goals and, specifically, to prioritize measures that support health equity; and that the Oregon Health Policy Board has directed the Health Plan Quality Metrics Committee to include innovative metrics and, specifically, a measure of health equity.

The *meaningful language access to culturally responsive health care services* measure that is before your committees for consideration presents an opportunity not only to prioritize a specific measure of health equity as has been requested, but also to demonstrate a commitment to health equity more broadly by championing the voices of CCO members who have long said that the inability to access health information in their primary language is a barrier to good health.

This measure is not a panacea and it will not, on its own, eliminate health disparities. It is a first step designed to address one of the many unjust structural factors in our health care system. We still have a long road ahead of us. For one, MAC feels strongly that the health system (and Medicaid especially) must also do a better job of communicating in clear and plain language. We must do more to address the many other unjust structural factors that exist in our health system, including racism, sexism, and ageism. However, we cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Measuring and holding CCOs accountable for providing *meaningful language access to culturally responsive health care services* is an important step toward building a more equitable health system. We encourage you to take this step now, and we hope that you will continue to push the system forward in future years.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to ongoing collaboration between our committees.

Sincerely,



Jeremiah Rigsby  
Co-Chair, Medicaid Advisory Committee



Dr. Maria Rodriguez  
Co-Chair, Medicaid Advisory Committee

Cc: The Oregon Health Policy Board