

## Public Comments

The [Health Care Market Oversight](#) (HCMO) program reviews proposed health care business deals to make sure they support Oregon's goals of health equity, lower costs, increased access, and better care. This document presents public comments related to the HCMO review of 079 Salem Health-Santiam Hospital & Clinics. OHA accepted public comments before the review period. Public comments were received via email to [hcmo.info@oha.oregon.gov](mailto:hcmo.info@oha.oregon.gov), voicemail, or by filling out the [Public Comment Form](#). Comments are presented below in the order received and may include typos or misspellings. Personal contact information for individuals has been removed.

OHA expresses no views on the substance of these comments, and their publication does not constitute an endorsement by OHA of the views expressed.

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer free of charge. Contact us by email at [hcmo.info@oha.oregon.gov](mailto:hcmo.info@oha.oregon.gov) or by phone at 503-945-6161. We accept all relay calls.

### 1. 12/20/25

Hello,

My name is Sheryl Wetzel.

I am very upset about the news of Salem Health buying out Santiam.

This cannot happen. Salem Health has already created a monopoly in Salem and this will further add to that.

I have been denied services at Salem Health because of my insurance carrier, which by the way is out of Chicago. I had total knee replacement surgery in Salem. Then, insurance got dropped and I could not speak with my surgeon. Thankfully Santiam took me under their wings and that is where I have been, very happily, doing my business.

They will be taking away any possible place for me and others to get needed help if and when we need it. It would be out of pocket and who can afford that?

We already pay huge rates for insurance and now because of this monopoly we can not use it.

People will needlessly die because they cannot seek help.

Sheryl Wetzel

## **2. 12/21/25**

Salem Health acts like a Regional Monopoly and has near total control on services anywhere you can get to without a car or without driving dozens of miles. and The State of Oregon has abandoned responsibility because it has focused on big city problems. We are being eaten alive and it is your responsibility to act. Take off the Portland blinders and look at how far you have to go to get services if you live in Salem. There is not a competitive market in Salem, full stop.

Randal Thomas

## **3. 1/20/26**

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed merger between Salem Health and Santiam Hospital. This merger would further consolidate Salem Health's already dominant position in the Salem area, creating an even more restrictive healthcare landscape for local residents.

Salem Health effectively operates as a monopoly in our region. Allowing it to expand further would reduce competition, limit patient choice, and ultimately harm the quality and accessibility of care. This is especially concerning for individuals with Regence BlueCross BlueShield coverage, who are already unable to access services at any Salem Health facility. If Salem Health absorbs Santiam Hospital, these patients will face even fewer options for receiving care within a reasonable distance.

The greater Salem community deserves a diverse and competitive healthcare environment, one that supports patient choice, fosters innovation, and ensures fair access for all insurance holders. Approving this merger would move us in the opposite direction.

I urge the Oregon Health Authority to reject the proposed merger and protect the healthcare options available to residents of the Salem area.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Quisenberry

**4. 1/21/26**

Good afternoon,

I am looking to add my voice to the concern of a partnership of Salem Health with Santiam Health. I have lived in Dallas for the past 30 years. We had used a local doctor's office for the entirety of our time in Dallas. They birthed our children and helped oversee their health as they grew into adults.

Salem Health purchased our local doctors office, as well as our local hospital where we did all of our testing, blood draws, and lab work. They also purchased the surgery center I used in Salem, as well as numerous other clinics in our area.

We use Blue Cross insurance which I assume you are aware Salem Health will not accept. Not only will they not accept our insurance, but they refuse to see any Blue Cross patients whether we intend to use insurance or not. A thirty year relationship had to be dissolved due to their inability to come to agreeable terms with Blue Cross. We had to switch not only our primary care providers, but also switch where we have done all of our health management over the past 30 years.

I do not wish for the same outcome for the people who are provided care in the Santiam Health system. Again please add my voice to those that are opposed and deny this partnership.

Thank you.

John Kennedy

**5. 1/22/26**

Living in Aumsville, Santium Hospital & Clinics is our only reasonable option. I am deeply concerned about the merger between Santium Hospital and Salem Health. My wife and I have Blue Cross insurance, as that is the only option from her retirement

plan. According to Salem Health, they do not accept Blue Cross insurance, and we fear losing access to our local health care. Please do not allow this merger unless and until we can be assured that Blue Cross insurance will continue to be accepted.

Alan Frisbie

**6. 1/22/26**

Dear Oregon Health Authority Review Team,

I am writing as a local resident and patient to share concerns regarding the proposed merger between Salem Health and Santiam Hospital & Clinics.

My family currently carries Regence BlueCross BlueShield insurance. As a result of Salem Health's contract dispute with Regence, Salem Health facilities are no longer in network for us. Because of this, we intentionally shifted our care to Santiam Hospital, which continues to accept our insurance and has provided an essential in-network option for our family.

My concern is that approval of this merger could eliminate that option. While I understand that insurance contracts may not change immediately upon merger approval, consolidation often leads to renegotiation or standardization of payer contracts under the acquiring system. If Santiam ultimately adopts Salem Health's insurance relationships, families like mine could lose access to any local in-network hospital care without changing insurance plans or traveling significantly farther for services. This would meaningfully reduce access to affordable care and create financial risk for many patients.

In addition, I am concerned about the broader impact this merger could have on competition in the Salem–Mid-Willamette Valley area. With fewer independent hospital systems, patients and employers may face higher healthcare costs, reduced negotiating leverage with insurers, and fewer choices for care. A more consolidated hospital market can also limit alternatives when contract disputes arise, as patients have fewer viable in-network options.

I respectfully ask the Oregon Health Authority to closely evaluate whether this merger would:

- Reduce meaningful competition in the regional healthcare market

- Limit patient choice or insurance network access
- Increase the likelihood of higher healthcare costs for patients and employers

If the merger is approved, I encourage OHA to consider conditions or safeguards that protect insurance network diversity and preserve affordable, in-network access to care for patients in the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment and for your careful review of this proposed transaction.

Matt McMahan

**7. 1/23/26**

Salem Hospital & Santiam Hospital seeking approval for merger. I am against the merger due to the great distance of providing quality care to the patients & families they serve. After Salem Hospital became out-of-network with Blue Cross & Blue Shield Insurance, we move all of our medical care out of Salem to Santiam. The difference is between night & day with the quality and professionalism of the staff between the two facilities. We have been to Salem Hospital ER & had some out-patient procedures & the care we received was sub-standard. The staff are very unprofessional, rude, & do not listen to the patient or family members who know the detailed medical history of the patients. Santiam Hospital & clinical staff take the time to listen & the care was provided as it needed to be. This merger is not good for the community that needs to have a facility that will provide professional, evidence-based practice, in a caring facility for the population it is serving. We moved here in 2014 & had one interview with Salem Hospital to which I am overly qualified for but ended the interview because of the attitude & opinions of the nurses I spoke with. I am a retired certified registered nurse from the VA Medical Center to which I am very proud of & the care that was provided by the system I worked for over 21 years. This merger is not good for the patients and community it is to serve and this is my opinion.

Linda Kay Mitchell

**8. 2/3/26**

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing because I cannot state strongly enough how opposed I am to Salem Health continuing to expand its control over healthcare in our region. Their current attempt to acquire Santiam Hospital and its twelve clinics—serving communities from Woodburn to Albany—would be deeply harmful to the well-being of residents throughout Marion and Linn counties.

Salem Health has already forced itself across the Salem area, leaving very few meaningful alternatives for patients. I fundamentally oppose this level of consolidation. While I could begrudgingly accept such dominance if patient care were clearly the organization's top priority, Salem Health has repeatedly demonstrated that financial growth—not patient well-being—is its primary concern.

They continue to absorb smaller clinics while refusing to accept all forms of insurance, limiting access to care for many people. As a resident of Keizer in Marion County, it took me months to find a primary care clinic accepting new patients that was not part of Salem Health. That experience alone should be a warning sign of what further consolidation would mean.

Beyond the broader monopoly issue, I have immediate personal concerns. If Salem Health expands further, my employer may be forced to change insurance providers. If that happens, there is a real possibility that my current clinic will no longer accept the new insurance, leaving me with no practical option but Salem Health. Patients should not be coerced into a healthcare system because all alternatives have been eliminated.

In my experience and in the experiences shared widely within this community, Salem Health suffers from negligent staffing and profit-driven administrative decisions. Healthcare and profit should never be paired in a way that overrides patient care, access, and choice.

I urge you to use whatever authority or influence you have to prevent Salem Health from merging yet again and becoming an even larger monopoly in our region. Our communities deserve accessible, patient-centered healthcare—not a single dominant system that prioritizes expansion over people.

Sincerely,

Ryan Hewlett

## **9. Letters of Support - Salem Health & Santiam Hospital, 2/12/2026**

The Board Chairs of the Salem Health Foundation and the Salem Health West Valley Foundation submitted a [letter](#) and [attachment](#) to OHA regarding the Salem-Santiam Transaction.

## **10. Letter of Support\_Salem Hospitals, 2/16/2026**

Representative Scharf submitted a [letter](#) to OHA regarding the Salem-Santiam Transaction.

## **11. Letter of Support – Salem Health & Santiam Hospital Affiliation, 2/16/2026**

Chad Ludwig, Founder and Executive Director of Bridges Oregon, submitted a [letter](#) and [attachment](#) to OHA regarding the Salem-Santiam Transaction.

## **12. Opposition to Proposed Salem Health/Santiam Hospital Merger, 2/19/2026**

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed merger between Salem Health and Santiam Hospital. This merger would further consolidate Salem Health's already dominant position in the Salem area, creating an even more restrictive healthcare landscape for local residents.

Salem Health effectively operates as a monopoly in our region. Allowing it to expand further would reduce competition, limit patient choice, and ultimately harm the quality and accessibility of care. This is especially concerning for individuals with Regence BlueCross BlueShield coverage, who are already unable to access services at any Salem Health facility. If Salem Health absorbs Santiam Hospital, these patients will face even fewer options for receiving care within a reasonable distance.

The greater Salem community deserves a diverse and competitive healthcare environment, one that supports patient choice, fosters innovation, and ensures fair access for all insurance holders. Approving this merger would move us in the opposite direction.

I urge the Oregon Health Authority to reject the proposed merger and protect the healthcare options available to residents of the Salem area.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Quisenberry

**13. Regarding Salem Health and Santiam Partnership, 2/23/2026**

Senator Kim Thatcher, submitted a [letter](#) to OHA regarding the Salem-Santiam Transaction.

**14. No Subject, 2/22/2026**

Everyone who lost the ability to go to Salem health clinics because of that company no longer accepting blue cross/blue shield will now no longer have an option in this area. If you have money to merge and buy up santiam hospital, get back to negotiating with blue cross blue shield.

**15. No Subject 2/26/26**

Regarding the proposed Salem Health - Santiam merger: My husband and I have been in the Salem Health system since moving to Salem in 2022 from Southern California. Being on Medicare and Tricare for Life, we needed a wide range of ""ologists"" available to respond to our many health challenges. We have had almost NO concerns or complaints about the care we have received, which has ranged from simple bi-annual follow up consults to hospitalizations. Those hospital stays were for emergency appendectomy (me), emergency transport for heart attack (my husband's third since 2004) and resulting replacement of 2 stents, and just last year, three times through the ER & into hospital in six weeks for pneumonia, pulmonary embolism, then pneumonia again (me), and lastly, emergency admission by my husband's cardiologist for severe anemia and dehydration.

Today, as I write this, we are both in as good health as our ages and ongoing health issues can allow, keeping very active in Salem with volunteer work and with household ""honey-do's"" and gardening projects. We credit the many providers with Salem Health and the excellent facilities it has with returning us to good health each time it has taken a dive since moving here.

As to the merger, specifically, what I have read about the proposal sounds like a winning proposition for the people of the Santiam area, especially those who need expanded access such as an Urgent Care Clinic in the Canyon. While some might see it as a negative - the huge Salem Health system taking over - my personal experience

with SH is 70% positive with another 20% being truly exceptional and maybe 10% being less than positive. This is coming from a 75-year-old former lowan who grew up with an RN mother who said, ""Don't be afraid to speak plainly to a doctor, ever. They are humans, not gods. If you're not happy with something that involves them or their people, tell them, straight out."" I have followed that advice my entire life and always serve as my own best advocate where my health needs are concerned.

Nancy Layton

**16. No Subject, 3/3/26**

Merging Salem Health with Santiam will leave those of us, which are thousands, insured by BCBS either through medicare or private employers, WITHOUT an in network hospital that is within 30 miles.

We have lost many in network providers. Salem Health has already a monopoly on health services if you live in Salem and surrounding area. Please take this situation in strong consideration regarding this merger.

Thank you

**17. No Subject, 3/7/26**

Salem Health and Santiam Hospital & Clinics should not be allowed to merge until Salem Health can provide coverage for all major health plans. As THE major health provider in the area, their inability to accept Regence BCBS is completely ludicrous and leaves thousands of Marion County residents with few options. As Salem Health continues to try to monopolize the health care system in the Salem area by buying additional hospitals and medical practices, residents with Regence BCBS, such as myself, are finding it difficult to find quality care. To be clear, BCBS is one of the largest and most prominent providers in the nation and is often provided through employers, meaning that people like myself do not have much of an option to select another provider without paying unreasonable sums. Salem Health has failed the Salem Community and should not be allowed to spread its reach until it does the right thing and starts accepting all major health insurance providers.

**18. No Subject, 3/8/26**

I object to Salem health merging with Santiam. Salem Health has a monopoly as it is. If they merge they must agree to immediate coverage of all insurance companies. A

friend was sent to OHSU for an urgent procedure because Salem Health does not take blue cross. Force them to take all insurance with no extra charges or no deal.

**19. No Subject, 3/8/26**

I am VERY concerned about this merger. Salem Health already has a defacto monopoly on many healthcare services and merging with Santiam Hospitals and Clinics would destroy all remaining options except for Legacy Health's Silverton Hospital. I am lucky that I am married, otherwise I would be stuck with useless Blue Cross. My employer offers Anthem Blue cross, but Salem Hospital will not accept ANY Blue Cross. This merger would also destroy the friendly small town culture at Santiam Hospital. I broke my shoulder in 2024 and had to go to the ER. I drove to Stayton's ER and was in/out within an hour. Not even possible at Salem Hospital or West Valley in Dallas.

I recently changed sleep medicine providers from Salem Health because they could not keep appointments and prioritized "new patient " appointments over existing customers when they didn't have the staffing to support existing patients. I looked at Santiam Hospitals and Clinics, but with the merger, the experience would quickly be ruined. I ended up at a small clinic in Salem.

I urge the State to deny this merger. Salem Health is anti-competitive and this merger will only hurt patients.

**20. Salem Health and Santiam Health merger, 3/8/26**

To the Oregon Health Authority Health Care Market Oversight Program,

I am writing to submit public comment regarding the proposed affiliation or merger between Salem Health Hospitals & Clinics and Santiam Hospital & Clinics.

I am concerned that this transaction could significantly reduce healthcare competition in the mid-Willamette Valley and may negatively affect patient access, affordability, and service availability for residents of Salem, Stayton, and surrounding rural communities.

Salem Health already represents the dominant hospital system serving the Salem metropolitan area. If Santiam Hospital becomes fully integrated into the Salem Health system, it would further consolidate healthcare services under a single provider network. When healthcare markets become highly concentrated, patients often

experience higher costs, fewer provider choices, and reduced negotiating leverage for insurers and employers. These impacts ultimately fall on patients through higher premiums, deductibles, and out-of-pocket costs.

In addition to cost concerns, I am also concerned about the potential long-term impact on service availability in rural communities. Santiam Hospital serves a vital role in providing accessible care to residents of Stayton, the Santiam Canyon, and other surrounding rural areas. When smaller hospitals are absorbed into larger systems, there is often pressure to centralize services in larger urban facilities. Over time, this can lead to reductions in local services such as specialty care, diagnostics, or emergency capacity, forcing patients to travel farther for care.

Maintaining independent healthcare access points in rural communities is critical for patient safety and timely care. Any reduction in services in Stayton could create additional strain on Salem Health's main campus while also increasing travel burdens for rural residents.

I respectfully ask the Oregon Health Authority to carefully evaluate the competitive and patient access implications of this proposed transaction. In particular, I encourage the agency to closely examine:

- The level of market concentration this merger would create in the Salem region
- The potential impact on healthcare prices and insurance negotiations
- The long-term preservation of services at Santiam Hospital
- Guarantees that rural patients will maintain access to essential healthcare services locally

If the transaction moves forward, strong enforceable conditions should be considered to ensure that patient access, service levels, and affordability are protected for the communities served by Santiam Hospital.

Thank you for your consideration of this public comment and for your work protecting healthcare access and competition in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Cliff Carpentier

**21. Salem Health Insurance, 3/8/26**

It's completely unacceptable to me that as huge as Salem Health is that they have a monopoly on insurance acceptance. People who work hard and pay for insurance can't get services through Salem Health, but people who don't work, who don't have insurance, or who live on the streets can go into ER and not have to ever worry about paying. Doesn't make sense to me. Salem Health is run by greedy, greedy self-centered people who don't care about the working class at all.

**22. Voicemail, 3/9/26**

I understand you're accepting voicemails for the santiam hospital merger with Salem health so I wanted to also leave a message. I relocated to Salem 2 years ago from Alaska because the healthcare situation in Alaska was not great not many options and I relocated an older sibling here as well from across the country because of the great hospital here in Salem Salem health hospital. So I work full time remotely I am insured through regence Blue Cross worst insurance company ever in my entire 68 years of life I do work full time and I have my insurance through a large engineering firm headquartered out of Seattle 400 employees frankly the HR department could not care less. About what is happening with Regents so consequently when they did not renew the contract and would not come to the bargaining table again and I lost my coverage I was now 4 blocks walking distance to the only hospital in Salem and could no longer get services. There so when I had to get a heart test I had to go out to Good Samaritan in Corvallis which meant a daughter-in-law had to drive 3 hours down from joint base Lewis mcchord to drive me home. From the test. Just this past weekend I had a medical emergency. And I went to Salem clinic thank God their urgent care was open and they're trying to deal with the situation in house because I can't go to the only hospital here in town and now I won't be able to go to the only other nearby hospital. PM. I'd have to go to the only other hospital that's left for me which is in Silverdale Silverton whatever it is and also take my older sibling there as well I guess this merger completely screws over the 38,000 people who got kicked out of Salem health by Regents and I am just astonished that anybody in any regulatory position. Cannot care about 38,000 people 38,000 people 38,000 voters. Everybody keep that in mind I know it's only about the money but these are human lives and I have a very old car that is not going to make it to Silverton. If I get hit in a crosswalk in downtown Salem which is

where I'm now living which is a good likelihood because of how people are driving here? I have to ask the ambulance to ohh no don't take me to the hospital that's 4 blocks away let me die on the way to some other hospital it's disgraceful honestly it's I am now embarrassed that I live in Oregon based on this I it's an embarrassment you should all be so embarrassed to allow this to happen.

**23. Santiam Salem Health merger, 3/11/26**

My name is Ben Bobeda and I was born in the Dallas Hospital. I have watched the people of Polk county receive better care in Dallas since the merger with Salem Health several years ago. I believe the residents of the Santiam Canyon area will receive better care and easier access to health care, specialists etc with this merger and the backing of a larger hospital and health care system. We need to keep a strong health care system available to our rural residents in Oregon and I believe strengthening relationships like this will be a win for the Santiam community.

**24. No Subject, 3/20/26**

This is in regards to the proposed merger of Salem Health and Santiam. This merger should not be allowed. For decades now Salem Health has tried to monopolize healthcare in the mid-valley area. Their own CEO doesnt want negotiations with Regence made public because of how bad Salem Health acted in the previous negotiations and the insane rate hikes they tried to get... and how when they didnt get them they tried to be punitive and ask for even more, so Regence walked away and protected their members from the grid of Salem Health. They also want to spin how they weaponized they patients by trying to act like it came from a place of caring... not wanting them to have bills, so they stopped seeing them. That is also not true, they did it to put pressure on the community to try to force patients to choose them. Period. They also don't want it known that its very likely that one of the people who negotiated with Regence was a former Regence employee with a chip on her shoulder over being laid off. It's obvious what Salem Health is trying to do here, and that's monopolize healthcare so they can continue to hike up prices and no one can stop them. If the state approves this merger Salem Health will be that much closer to controlling all Healthcare in the Mid-Willamette Valley. Do not let this happen to our community.

**25. Support for Salem Health and Santiam Hospital Partnership, 3/25/2026**

Representative Mannix submitted a [letter](#) to OHA regarding the Salem-Santiam Transaction.

**26. Santiam Hospital/Salem Health Merger, 3/31/2026**

Senator Girod submitted a [letter](#) to OHA regarding the Salem-Santiam Transaction.

**27. No Subject, 4/1/2026**

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to oppose the merger between Salem Health and Santiam Hospital. Of the reasons, three are most important.

First, care quality. When I've needed emergency care at Santiam Hospital, I've been promptly seen in the ER. In contrast, many in our community have consistently reported long wait times and overcrowding in Salem. It is not merely a population issue—they claim to “[operate] the busiest emergency department on the West Coast” despite Salem’s relative size. In January 2020, before the pandemic, Salem Reporter’s Troy Brynelson and Rachel Alexander confirmed it in their reporting. This is a systemic issue and it shows primary care access has not improved despite the expanding consolidation of primary care in Salem beneath Salem Health. I am concerned that these long-term failures will spread to Santiam Hospital.

Second, healthcare consolidation strips patients of choice. For healthcare to be ethical and effective, people need choice in providers. If a patient feels unheard or is poorly treated by one system, they need another option, or they might not seek care at all. As we’ve seen across the United States, consolidation leads to higher prices and less competitive pressure. This merger will only worsen these problems.

Third, let’s briefly examine Salem Health as a political actor. In 2015, they gave \$50,000 to a political action committee to defeat a payroll tax that would have expanded transit access. That was among the largest contributions made regarding that measure, and Salem Health played a leading role in the opposition. They fought against improving infrastructure that its own lower-wage workers and the community rely on. Salem Health acts like big business, not a community member. If there were a measure necessary for our community on today’s ballot, but which would inconvenience Salem Health, their history shows they would bring outsized resources to defeat it.

I oppose this merger because it will shrink access to care. The data show Salem Health's ER struggles have been an ongoing problem and consolidation does not increase care accessibility or relieve financial problems. As a community and as a state, our priority should be expanding access to comprehensive healthcare, especially in rural areas that are already struggling across the country. Because this would not fix those issues, but would likely create or exacerbate them, I cannot support the acquisition of Santiam Hospital by Salem Health, and I urge OHA to oppose it.

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## About HCMO

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The Healthcare Market Oversight Program reviews proposed health care business deals to make sure they support statewide goals related to cost, equity, access, and quality. For more info, you can connect with HCMO staff:

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