

August 25, 2025

Leslie Ayhens  
CCO Quality of Care and Compliance Manager  
500 Summer St NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Ms. Ayhens:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Oregon Health Authority's (OHA) Medicaid Quality Strategy. [Reach Out and Read in Oregon](#) partners with 164 medical clinics and over 1,300 doctors, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants to provide an evidence-based, two-generation early relational health and early literacy model during EPSDT well-child visits from birth to kindergarten entry.

In 2024, according to [U.S. Literacy Rates by State](#), 48% of Oregon students over age 15 were below basic reading level. One-quarter were at a basic reading level, with 19% ranked proficient and 7% advanced. Limited literacy levels are linked to poorer health status, higher hospitalization rates, poor chronic disease management and increased health care costs. This all contributes to health disparities.

**As an overarching recommendation, Reach Out and Read proposes that OHA consider framing health literacy in the larger context of supporting family literacy, starting in a child's earliest years.** As Oregon renews its focus on addressing health disparities and expanding access to health-promoting services, it will be critical to work in a coordinated, cross-sector way to proactively address literacy levels in Oregon. [Health care system literacy interventions](#) can play a key role in improving health outcomes.

As an early literacy and relational health program, Reach Out and Read champions and promotes the positive effects of engaging in daily reading and other language-rich activities with young children and their parents. **The earliest years are a time of incredible growth and development for both the child--and the child's parent. This is a time when parents are most receptive to learning and growing with their children.**

Supporting two-generational early literacy and relational health can strengthen OHA's strategic overall goal of eliminating health disparities. It also aligns with OHA goals to improve quality and access to care; address health-related social needs (HSRNs); and, improve access to services and supports that are responsive to individuals' language preferences, communication needs, and varying levels of literacy.

We look forward to continuing our work with Oregon pediatric clinicians, health care systems and families.

Sincerely,

Shannon M. Blood, MA  
Associate Director, Policy & Partnerships

**"By treating literacy as an urgent health issue, we can improve literacy rates and health outcomes in the United States, and ensure all children thrive—beginning today."**

(*Frontiers in Pediatrics*. Reading for life-long health, 23 July 2024. Shulman K, Baicker K, Mayes L. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11303134/>)