

NEWS RELEASE



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Headline: Oregon is ready to lead on health reform

The federal health reform legislation signed yesterday by President Obama moves Oregon even further ahead in meeting the mission of the new Oregon Health Authority and citizen Oregon Health Policy Board.

The Health Authority and Board were created through House Bill 2009 last year with a mission to increase access to health care, reduce the cost of care, and improve the quality of care and health of all Oregonians.

For decades high costs have kept people away from getting the care they need, and the recent economic crisis has caused more and more people to lose employer-provided health care. Today in Oregon approximately 82,000 people are on a reservation list for the Oregon Health Plan, and there are about 600,000 people without health care in the state.

"I applaud President Obama and members of Congress who at long last have delivered needed reforms to our health care system. These reforms will benefit everyone – critical consumer protections for those who want to keep the insurance they have and access to health insurance for those who the current system has shut out," said Governor Kulongoski. "With these federal reforms, coupled with the state reforms passed last session, we will bring a more just, accessible and higher quality health care system to all Oregonians."

The federal legislation, when fully implemented and combined with the Healthy Kids program, will provide access to care for some 500,000 Oregonians, or about 85 percent of the state's uninsured.

"Increasing access to care was job one for the Oregon Health Authority," said Bruce Goldberg, M.D., director-designee of OHA. "With the passage of the federal legislation we can now focus on improving the way that care is delivered, the quality of the care, and lowering the cost of care for everyone in Oregon."

The federal legislation also provides insurance industry reforms, federal investments into public health, mental health, chronic disease prevention, and health care disparities that will keep people healthier and reduce demand on the health care system over the long term. All the elements of the bill fit well with the work already begun by the Oregon Health Authority and Board.

“We can’t talk about health care without talking about how to prevent diseases and other issues that affect our wellness,” said Dr. Goldberg. “Oregon will now be able to move forward in taking an aggressive approach in fulfilling the mission of improving the health of everyone.”

In addition to public health and wellness, state-level reforms under way by the Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Health Policy Board include everything from how to recruit and train a health care workforce to how to leverage public purchasing of health care to lower costs and improve quality.

To learn more, go to www.oregon.gov/OHA.