

## Health care reform is working in Oregon

By Chris DeMars

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In Oregon, we know what works for us, especially when it comes to our health. That's why no matter what's happening — or not happening — on the national stage, Oregonians are ready to transform our health care system to deliver better health and better care at lower costs for all.

Right now we pay into a broken system where care is fragmented and wasteful. We treat illness instead of preventing it. Emergency rooms are no longer last resorts but, for many, the first. Most clinics and hospitals are forced to deliver some care based on what they get paid for instead of what works best.

Too often, outcomes are different depending on our race or socioeconomic class. The stories are heartbreaking. A Latino child born in Oregon is twice as likely to develop diabetes as a non-Latino. Infant mortality rates are twice as high for African American babies as white babies.

Our health care system is supposed to empower us to live healthier and happier lives, not discourage us!

But today in Oregon, many people — both within and outside state government — are working to create a better health care system for everyone. One of the most exciting Oregon-based health reforms is the patient-centered primary care movement. Through primary care "homes," you have a personal, continuous relationship with a team of health professionals instead of a single doctor or nurse. The right kind of care — medical, dental or therapy — would be delivered to everyone who needs it.

The model is focused on keeping us healthy through wellness, prevention and chronic disease management. Health records and providers would be available to us when we need them and our care would be coordinated, reducing unnecessary tests and medical errors.

Believe it or not, all this could actually cost less than what we pay now. Patient-centered primary care homes could also help eliminate health disparities by race and income. Research from the Commonwealth Fund shows disparities largely disappear when adults have a primary care "home" with access to high-quality services and systems of care.

Northwest Health Foundation, the Oregon Health Authority and others are working together to expand this model statewide, and we hope all of Oregon's providers will adopt this model. This is the way to better care, better health and lower costs.

Patient-centered primary care homes are part of the movement to transform the Oregon Health Plan's delivery system through Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs). The CCO model was passed with a bi-partisan vote of the Legislature and Gov. John Kitzhaber, and would be responsible for administering care in a better way for better health and lower costs.

Yes, we need to keep our eyes on what occurs at the federal level because those decisions will affect the flow of funds to support our work. But no matter what decisions are made by Congress or the Supreme Court, important improvements in health care are happening right here, right now, in Oregon.

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