



**SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE
HOUSE MAJORITY OFFICE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 8, 2023

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Democrats Strengthen Oregon's Response to the Behavioral Health and Addiction Crisis

New laws signed by Governor Kotek will expand access to behavioral health care and addiction treatment, lower response times and costs, bolster behavioral health workforces, and save lives.

SALEM, Ore. - Today, Oregon House and Senate behavioral health care champions joined Governor Tina Kotek as she signed multiple bills that strengthen Oregon's response to the behavioral health and addiction crisis impacting the state.

During the 2023 Session, Democrats worked to address these crises on many different fronts. The legislation signed by the governor will expand access to behavioral health care and addiction treatment in every corner of the state, lower response times and costs, bolster the behavioral health workforce, and save lives.

Building on [previous](#) historic investments, Democrats also [passed](#) more than \$153 million in funding for behavioral health care services. This budget and other related policies will maintain existing funding, make sure previous funding and programs are working as intended, and increase access to urgently-needed care and treatment.

In tandem with more bills passed this year, these programs and investments will make Oregon communities safer and save lives.

“Oregonians have been clear that we need to get people the appropriate, high quality, and affordable care they need,” **said Representative Rob Nosse (D-Inner SE & Inner NE Portland)**. “Behavioral health is not one-size-fits-all. But our work this session to invest in key parts of Oregon’s behavioral health system, stabilize existing funding streams, and give providers the tools they need will make getting care more accessible and affordable to everyone.”

“As a former prosecutor, I’ve seen the cracks in our behavioral health system, and I know why so many Oregonians need to see progress now. The work we did this session to strengthen our care system and create new emergency programs will make our communities safer and keep people alive. These are big problems that won’t be solved overnight, but I am confident that the steps we took this year are going to make an impact that Oregonians will see and feel every day,” **said Senate Majority Leader Kate Lieber (D-Beaverton & SW Portland)**.

The bills signed by the Governor include:

Opioid Harm Reduction Package ([House Bill 2395](#))

HB 2395, the [Opioid Harm Reduction Package](#), makes life-saving emergency treatments, like naloxone, more available in public buildings, including restaurants, grocery stores, police departments, and schools and allows its distribution by first responders and emergency care providers. When administered, medications like naloxone can restore breathing and reverse an overdose by rapidly blocking the effects of opioids.

“Making this bill law today is a critical step toward saving the lives of people across our state who may be unintentionally poisoned by opioids,” **said Representative Dexter (D-NW & Downtown Portland, Linnton & Cathedral Park)**, a chief sponsor, carrier of the bill, and a board-certified physician. “As elected leaders, our first priority is to protect the health and safety of Oregonians. Today we took definitive action that will decrease the senseless and unnecessary deaths that are tragically taking the lives of people in all of our communities. This bill puts tools in the hands of Oregonians everywhere to save lives and breaks down barriers to treatment.”

“These life-saving, emergency solutions came directly from Oregonians on the front lines of the opioid crisis. The first responders, law enforcement officers, school employees, and health care professionals who care for our communities asked for these tools, and we listened. It’s our job to support these tireless heroes, and I’m glad that we could deliver,” **said Senator Deb Patterson (D-Salem)**, a chief sponsor of the legislation and chair of the Senate Committee on Health Care.

The Opioid Harm Reduction Package further improves youth overdose reporting, legalizes fentanyl test strips and modernizes Oregon’s public health statutes to meet the fentanyl crisis.

The package was [developed](#) in response to the deadly fentanyl crisis that is devastating communities across Oregon – and nationwide – and will save lives.

Stable Funding for the 9-8-8 Suicide Prevention & Behavioral Health Line ([House Bill 2757](#))

HB 2757 [provides](#) a stable funding source for Oregon’s two 9-8-8 call centers and helps to build out the mobile crisis response system so that services are uniformly available 24/7 across the state.

“This is going to save lives,” **said Representative Tawna Sanchez (D-N & NE Portland)**, chief sponsor of the bill. “Answering the phone and talking someone down before they end up in an emergency room or jail is going to be the most effective approach to solving the crisis we’re in before it gets worse.”

Oregonians experiencing a mental health crisis can call the line and receive immediate care through compassionate one-on-one conversations and the emotional support they need in their toughest moment. In Oregon, 9-8-8 resolves or de-escalates [nearly 97% of calls](#) over the phone.

“Oregonians across the state are struggling to get the help they need,” **said Senator Jeff Golden (D - Ashland)**, a sponsor of HB 2757. “This law is going to make sure our new mobile crisis response system is run efficiently and effectively for every Oregonian, no matter where they live.”

“With our work to build out our 9-8-8 system, we are making sure that when an Oregonian picks up the phone, help is on the other end,” **said Representative Dacia**

Grayber (SW Portland & East Beaverton), a firefighter and co-sponsor of the bill.

“This session, we also passed my bill, [HB 3426](#), to require 988 crisis hotline centers to have policies and train staff on serving firefighters and other first responders so everyone gets the individualized care they need.”

Importantly, HB 2757:

- Establishes the 9-8-8 Trust Fund, which will streamline federal and state funds. This back-end coordination of funds will help the 9-8-8 system run smoothly.
- Sets a small fee on telecommunications similar to the fee for 9-1-1. The fee is restricted to funding call centers and baseline funding for mobile crisis response. Both are essential core functions that require sustainable funding.
- Creates a multi-stakeholder advisory group to guide implementation and provide oversight as the 9-8-8 system develops.

Low-income households participating in the Oregon Lifeline subsidized telecom program are exempted from the monthly fee.

Hope & Recovery Bill: Improving Measure 110 Implementation ([House Bill 2513](#))

HB 2513, the [bipartisan](#) Hope and Recovery Bill, strengthens and improves voter-approved Measure 110 (The Drug Addiction Treatment and Recovery Act) implementation one year into its rollout. This will help connect Oregonians struggling with addiction with the care they need and put them on a path to recovery.

“Oregon’s Black and Brown families have suffered the greatest impact due to lack of culturally sound, local, safe and affordable services and disproportionately higher rates of arrests,” **said Representative Travis Nelson (D-N & NE Portland)**, vice chair of the Behavioral Health and Health Care Committee and a registered nurse. “Just like the rest of our healthcare system, addiction and behavioral health services need to meet people where they are and be focused on their health, not on further criminalizing behavioral health.”

According to the Oregon Health Authority’s second quarter report, Measure 110 substance use treatment [has grown 44%](#) in the first six months of full funding, supporting services like recovery housing, detox centers, and other critical programs opening regularly. Oregonians in recovery who were provided housing services increased by more than 125%, and those provided employment services increased by 136%.

“Oregonians passed Measure 110 to move our state away from the ineffective and harmful impacts of the ‘War on Drugs’ and towards treatment programs that actually work to reduce drug use and addiction. It was a significant change to fix a complicated crisis, and this bill recognizes that we’re going to have to keep monitoring and adjusting these programs to make sure they work to keep Oregonians safer and healthier,” **said Senator Winsvey Campos (D-Aloha)**, who carried HB 2513 on the floor of the Senate.

The Hope and Recovery bill works to make sure addiction and treatment services are available to all Oregonians by:

- Bolstering staffing and streamlining application processes to speed up approval and get funds out the door;
- Centralizing the support hotline to get people connected to services more efficiently; and
- Ensuring accountability by improving collection and accuracy of Measure 110 program data.

Preventing Opioid Overdose Deaths ([Senate Bill 1043](#))

SB 1043 requires health care and drug treatment facilities to provide two doses of opioid overdose reversal medicine and related medical supplies upon discharge to patients who were there for treatment for opioid abuse. The bill also [establishes](#) civil liability protections to people who administer opioid overdose medication to a person experiencing an overdose. This bill was introduced at the request of Governor Kotek by Senate President Rob Wagner.

“Our state and our nation are struggling through a terrible opioid overdose epidemic, driven by the abuse of fentanyl. SB 1043 comes at a critical time for our state and will save lives by providing essential medication to the people most at risk for opioid overdoses,” **said Senate President Rob Wagner (D-Lake Oswego)**.

Education and Safety ([Senate Bill 238](#))

SB 238 directs the Oregon Health Authority, State Board of Education, and Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission to develop curricula that teaches students about the dangers of synthetic opioids and laws that provide immunity or other protections related to drug or alcohol use.

“Too many kids are exposed to dangerous drugs and aren’t equipped with the tools and knowledge to navigate these experiences,” **said Senator Chris Gorsek (D-Gresham)**, a chief sponsor of the bill. “We’re going to fix that by educating our students about the dangers of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids, so they can keep themselves safe.”

Task Force on Alcohol Pricing and Addiction Services ([House Bill 3610](#))

HB 3610 establishes a task force to consider whether Oregon should increase taxes on alcoholic beverages. The task force will also consider how the state spends taxes generated by alcohol sales.

“This legislation provides the opportunity to assess and better understand the scope of alcohol addiction as well as its economic elements and impacts, and explore strategies to address it,” **said Representative Janelle Bynum (D-Happy Valley & N Clackamas County)**, a sponsor of the bill. “This also means including the voices of culturally specific providers, patients, and industry. We can’t do this work without the input of a wide variety of individuals with lived experience.”

Answering Oregonians’ call to fix the behavioral health and addiction crisis is a top priority for Democrats in the Oregon [House](#) and [Senate](#). Both caucuses are committed to building on this work in 2024, and beyond, until every Oregonian is safe and has the support they need to live a healthy life.

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