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Press Contact:

Hannah Kurowski

hannah.kurowski@oregonlegislature.gov

Oregon House Votes to Support Behavioral Health Workers and A Stronger Mental Health System

HB 4004 will fund wage increases and other supports to retain essential mental health workers

SALEM, Ore. - Today, the Oregon House of Representatives voted to support the state's behavioral health workforce, strengthening access to mental health care and substance abuse treatment. [House Bill 4004 B](#) will provide over \$130M in grants to behavioral health providers to use for wage increases, retention bonuses and improvements to working conditions.

“This bill is a crucial step to meeting the immediate needs of behavioral health workers and their patients,” said [Rep. Rob Nosse](#) (D-Portland), Chair of the House Committee on Behavioral Health. “Now more than ever, we need to make sure these jobs are sustainable and invest in the people who are caring for Oregonians.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused burnout, stress and staff shortages for Oregon behavioral health providers, adding to existing workforce challenges. Oregon has the [fourth highest](#) rate of unmet need for mental health treatment in the country.

“We are beginning to build a behavioral health system where every Oregonian has access to the care they need,” said [Rep. Tawna Sanchez](#) (D-North and Northeast Portland), Co-Chair of the Joint Ways & Means Committee. “This action today supports our workforce right now so that they can continue providing Oregonians essential care for mental health and substance abuse issues.”

In 2021, the Legislature made a [\\$474 million investment](#) in behavioral health systems, including increased capacity in residential facilities, behavioral health clinics, and incentives to increase and diversify Oregon's behavioral health workforce. HB 4004 builds on those investments and addresses immediate workforce needs in the behavioral health system.

The bill is part of a larger package of critical health system and workforce supports put forward by the Legislature this session, including new supports for Oregon nurses ([House Bill 4003](#)), a \$45 million investment to address the workforce crisis at OHSU and a \$200 million investment in Future Ready Oregon ([Senate Bill 1545](#)), which will support workforce needs in key industry sectors including health care.

The bill passed the House on a 58-0 vote and now moves to the Senate.

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