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CONTACT: Rick Osborn, 503-986-1074
Rick.osborn@oregonlegislature.gov

Bill will make prescription drug labels more understandable to non-English speakers

SB 698: Requires drug labels be in English and a language patient understands

SALEM – The Oregon Senate took steps to ensure everyone in the state is able to properly take their prescribed medications by establishing language requirements regarding labeling.

[Senate Bill 698](#) – which passed with a 23-7 vote today on the Senate floor – requires the State Board of Pharmacy to adopt rules regarding provision of prescription drug labels or inserts in both English and a language the patient can understand.

“No one should ever be at risk of getting sick or potentially dying because they are misusing their prescription drugs, especially when it’s because of a language barrier,” said Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-Gresham), who carried the bill on the Senate floor. “This bill will require multiple languages be used to convey critical information about how much of the medication to take and how often, in addition to side effects and other important information that needs to be communicated.”

All healthcare providers and recipients of federal financial assistance such as Medicare and Medicaid, under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, are required to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs by individuals with limited English language proficiency. According to the United States Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, 6 percent of Oregonians older than 5 years old have limited English language proficiency.

Those who are not English proficient tend to be more likely than fluent English speakers to experience medication errors due to inability to read or understand labels that provide instruction on how and when to take prescription medications. Currently, four states – California, New York, North Carolina and Texas – have specific laws requiring pharmacies to provide services in languages other than English.

Senate Bill 698 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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