

Oregon Struggles Amid Drug And Alcohol Addiction Crisis, Experts Say

PREMIUM

By: Ben Botkin



Oregon Health Forum breakfast on addiction./Ben Botkin/The Lund Report

Oregon has one of the highest drug and alcohol addiction rates in the country. But the solutions will not come quickly or easily.

Four advocates and medical professionals spoke about the state’s addiction crisis on Wednesday at a breakfast meeting at the Multnomah Athletic Club in Southwest Portland sponsored by the Oregon Health Forum, an affiliate of The Lund Report.

The big takeaway: More access is needed to treatment, and the public needs to realize that addiction is a chronic condition that needs long-term attention. Addiction services are often underfunded. Legalized marijuana – and the resulting blitz of advertising – makes youth access easier. Burnout is high among addiction treatment workers and pay is low.

Meanwhile, the beer ads continue.

“You can see ads that Coors Light has established themselves as the official beer of Saturday morning,” said Dr. Brad Anderson, chief of the Department of Addiction Medicine for Kaiser Permanente Northwest.

He encouraged the audience of about 110 attendees to compare buildings in Portland that treat addiction with those that treat other life-threatening diseases like cancer. Usually, cancer treatment centers are in state-of-the-art facilities but addiction services are in older buildings, he said.

“That’s not right,” he said. “We need to change that.”

Patients need to get prompt treatment for addiction services, with the same type of response that patients with chest pains receive, he said. The health system needs to consider the savings that come from addiction treatment instead of the costs, he said.

“We need to stop focusing on cost and start focusing on savings,” he said.

Oregon has one of the highest addiction rates and is among the worst states in providing treatment, data show. In 2017, Oregon had the highest rate of marijuana and pain reliever abuse. The state also ranked second in methamphetamine use and fourth in cocaine use, according to a 2019 Oregon Criminal Justice Commission report. The state also ranked third in its rate of people needing but not receiving treatment for alcohol and drug misuse.

Every day, about seven people in Oregon die from addiction, said Mike Marshall, executive director of Oregon Recovers, an advocacy group.

“We are in the midst of an unprecedented health crisis in this state,” Marshall said.

Dr. Reginald Richardson Sr., director of the Oregon Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission, said a new state plan was crafted with input from a dozen state agencies and others with expertise in addiction treatment and prevention.

“For the first time ever, we began to think of ourselves as a system,” he said.

He said he’ll be presenting the plan to Gov. Kate Brown this week. The [89-page document](#) estimates that Oregon is currently spending about \$6.7 billion on issues related to substance misuse, but less than 1% is going towards prevention, treatment or recovery for people with substance use disorders. The rest goes toward social and health problems and regulation costs for alcohol and drugs.

The plan calls for looking at potential revenue sources, such as alcohol and tobacco taxes, and shifting money away from ineffective programs. The plan’s four main goals are to put a statewide system in place and increase access to prevention, treatment and recovery for Oregonians across their lifetime.

Marshall said funding needs to be directed towards the plan so it can be implemented. He said raising the price of alcohol 10% across-the-board would reduce consumption and bring immediate public health benefits such as a reduction in incarceration rates and children in foster care.

Marshall said he’s disappointed that no significant action is taking place this legislative session to put the plan into action. He said Oregon Recovers is considering making a formal request for a special session to address addiction this year instead of waiting for the 2021 session.

Brown issued an executive order in 2018 that highlighted the state’s addiction crisis and put the commission and advocates to work on the plan.

Richardson defended waiting until the 2021 session.

“I’ve come to believe that’s not necessarily a bad thing because if you look at the plan, there are a number of systems we need to get moving in the right direction,” Richardson said.

“Moving it to the 2021 session allows us to build the kind of support we need to move the plan comprehensively,” Richardson said, adding that in a short session

there are limited opportunities to amend a bill.

The panelists also touched on workforce needs. Alison Noice, executive director of the nonprofit CODA, said how the community talks about addiction can motivate people to enter the field. Noice said the work is rewarding, but financially challenging for nonprofit organizations.

“For those of us in the nonprofit arena, we rely on, frankly, the charity of our employees to do this work,” she said.

The panel was moderated by Kendall Clawson, chief executive officer of Grantmakers of Oregon and SW Washington.

You can reach Ben Botkin at ben@thelundreport.org or via [Twitter @BenBotkin1](https://twitter.com/BenBotkin1).

Feb 19 2020

News source: [The Lund Report](#)

Keywords:

[addiction](#), [CODA](#), [Mike Marshall](#), [Brad Anderson](#), [Reginald Richardson](#), [Oregon Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission](#), [Oregon Recovers](#)

[Log in](#) or [register](#) to post comments

TICKETS ON SALE NOW



Medical Harm: Moving Beyond Deny and Defend

Learn what Oregon is doing to advance a new, transparent approach to communicating with patients who experience medical harm. This engaging panel, co-hosted with the Oregon Patient Safety Commission, will feature a powerful personal testimonial about medical harm, a provider's experience implementing the model in Oregon, and the perspective of a national expert on moving away from "deny and defend."

Moderator:

Eric B. Lindauer, JD, of Eric B. Lindauer, PC

Panelists:

Shannon Alexander, MBA, RN, CPHRM,
Director of Patient Safety and Clinical Risk
Management, Providence Health & Services

Thomas H. Gallagher, MD, MACP,
Professor and Associate Chair, University of
Washington Medicine Center for Scholarship
in Patient Care Quality and Safety

Leilani Schweitzer, Assistant Vice President;
Communication & Resolution, Patient Liaison,
Stanford Health Care

Wednesday, Mar. 18 | 7-9 am
Multnomah Athletic Club



Group Subscription

Interested in a group subscription?



Ask us about it by April 1st.

 **THE LUND REPORT** *Call (503) 894-8548 or click this ad to email us.*

Story Ideas

Have a scoop for The Lund Report? Submit your story ideas [here](#).

Promote Your Event



Hosting an event?

Promote it here!

 **THE LUND REPORT** *Click this ad for more details*

PO Box 82841, Portland OR, 97282 | info@thelundreport.org | 503-894-8548