

Members Come Together at Historic Healthcare Summit

On March 31, over a hundred SEIU 503 members came together from all corners of the state for historic Healthcare Summit in Salem.

It was an opportunity for care providers and state agency employees to explore the complexities of healthcare issues, to discuss their concerns with each other and to find areas of common ground. Members enthusiastically engaged and shared their personal stories with each other across sectors.

Attendees learned sobering statistics about the current status of healthcare in America, including the fact that healthcare costs have increased at 7 times the rate of inflation, and that the US spends more money per person on healthcare than any other country, but we are number fifty in life expectancy.

The event also included breakout sessions by sector, in which care providers addressed issues such as affordability, access to care, prevention and wellness, and the health insurance mandate. Care providers also learned about the history and future of healthcare transformation, and strategized about the path forward.

In 1981 Oregon became the first state to win a Medicaid waiver to provide nursing facility level of care in home and community based settings. This system became the model for the nation to rebalance the delivery of care, providing a continuum and array of choices for those who need 24/7 care and rehab, whether in home or community settings like Assisted Living, Nursing Facilities, Residential Care Facility, or Adult Foster Homes.

The healthcare transformation bill passed by the Oregon Legislature this year creates Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs) which will cover all Medicaid recipients. The bill also

specifies that non-traditional Health Workers will provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to reduce health disparities, improve care and reduce costs.

Looking ahead to 2014, health reform implementation will continue by:

- Expanding Medicaid from 100% of Federal Poverty Level to 133%;
- Requiring individuals to have insurance;
- Guaranteeing availability of insurance regardless of health status;
- Penalizing employers who don't provide coverage;
- Creating a Health Insurance Exchange that will provide an opportunity to shop for quality affordable plans for individuals and small employers;
- Enabling employers to reward employees for participation in wellness programs.

This is just a partial list of the coming changes. With so much happening, nobody is claiming expertise in these areas. However, the Summit was a launching point to create the opportunity for further discussion, and to empower members to take action. Homecare worker Carol Conlon (Grants Pass) observed, "The Healthcare Summit was awesome! I am so encouraged and so proud of our forward-thinking Union!"

Homecare worker Darryl Pickens (Portland) summed up, "the meeting was absolutely paramount. It broke everything down so that you could see what happened to healthcare and how we can address it in the future. Standing up as a group, standing together, that's the only way we can progress!"



Members share their opinions at the Health Care Summit.