

Medicaid: Auditors noted agency initially withheld information

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The agency found that over half — about 67,600 — still qualified and they were kept on the program. While 24,100 were found ineligible, the rest didn't respond to the state's inquiries, and were cut, although the agency expects that some of that group will be retroactively re-enrolled.

Auditors contended Wednesday that the health agency's delay in fixing that problem caused the agency to spend \$88 million that could have been avoided.

The health authority says that the costs were not avoidable, though, in part because it is not possible for the agency to tell whether someone who received Medicaid and was found ineligible on a certain date would have been ineligible on some prior date.

The federal government also requires the agency to keep people on Medicaid until they have gone through a process that officially determines that they no longer qualify for the program.

While auditors acknowledged that requirement, they also said that "regardless, expenses resulted because these clients remained on the caseload past the point when OHA reported they should have gone through an annual eligibility determination."

Auditors also noted that the agency initially withheld information.

"Our audit work was limited by prior agency management," auditors wrote. "At times, we were prevented direct access to staff, had our interviews with staff monitored, had our information requests delayed, and were occasionally provided with complete and/or inaccurate information."

They noted that responsiveness improved after a

new director, Patrick Allen, took the helm in September. Gov. Kate Brown named Allen to the post in the wake of a publicity scandal under the previous director, Lynne Saxton. Several other top leadership positions at the agency were also vacated.

"... Today's audit report provides the best information the audit team could obtain from OHA's previous uncooperative leadership and administration," Richardson said. "The amount of wasteful and incompetent spending at OHA has been staggering and has gone on for at least the past four years."

In response, the Oregon Health Authority Chief Financial Officer Laura Robison issued a public statement saying "we can do better." The agency acknowledged there was room for improvement while challenging the accuracy of some characterizations and assertions in the final audit document.

"We are making changes to improve the accuracy and transparency of our programs," Robison said.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Jail: 'It's not big enough'

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"We can't see everybody that's in custody visually," Lt. Matt Phillips, the jail's commander, said.

The technician then checks to see if the other side of the entryway is safe. When the technician isn't busy doing that, he or she must also scan live footage from 64 different cameras in the building, alerting deputies when an issue arises.

A lot can happen quickly in one area of the jail while the technician is focused on another area, Phillips said.

"Those 10 to 30 seconds makes a difference when looking at the different cameras," he said. "Some guy could be getting pummeled. With a better designed facility, it would be easier for him to do his job."

The jail also has blind spots, such as the emergency staircase deputies use to walk inmates to the recreation area on the roof of the building. The staircase has motion detectors but no video cameras. Multiple deputies are required to transfer inmates. A new jail, however, could include automatic doors that would allow inmates to walk out to the recreation areas straight from their cells, Parks said.

Deputies — often saddled with tasks such as paperwork, bookings and taking inmates to court hearings — sometimes are unable to prioritize



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
Orion Adamson said he thought funding for a new jail in Clatsop County would improve conditions for himself, other inmates and be a benefit to the community.

recreation hours.

"Roof time is one of the things that's important but not necessary for day-to-day operations," Parks said.

On the other hand, a new jail would present new challenges when inmates have court dates. While the downtown jail sits across the street from Circuit Court, the proposed site is a 15-minute drive away.

Inmates would continue

to appear at arraignment via video. For other hearings, two deputies would likely shuttle inmates to and from court, Phillips said.

Deputies often need to be creative when handling the quirks of a jail built for a different era. In 1980, the jail would hold only one or two women at a time, Bergin said. Women now account for roughly 25 percent of the jail's population.

Federal law prohibits male and female inmates from being able to hear or see each other from their living quarters. Depending on special needs, men and women sometimes occupy rooms next to each other. While thick walls prevent sound from traveling, deputies sometimes place shower curtains over windows to limit sight.

'Not big enough'

Orion Shay Adamson, a 42-year-old inmate who has stayed in the jail more than 20 times over two decades, said he and others would benefit from features such as a work-

out facility. A previous gym was closed in 1985 to accommodate a laundry room and an extra dormitory.

Adamson's most recent arrest came earlier this month for unlawful possession of heroin and methamphetamine. He doesn't feel cramped on a daily basis in his dormitory that includes others charged with drug-related crimes.

"For the amount of guys we have here it's adequate, but it's not big enough for what Mr. Bergin needs," Adamson said.

While speaking in a dormitory full of inmates Tuesday night, Bergin suggested the new jail could include expanded mental health treatment.

"That would be sweet," one inmate said.

While recognizing the benefits, Adamson acknowledged one obvious catch.

"Inmates would not like it because they would get longer stays, but the honest citizens of Astoria and Clatsop County would probably benefit from a new jail," Adamson said.



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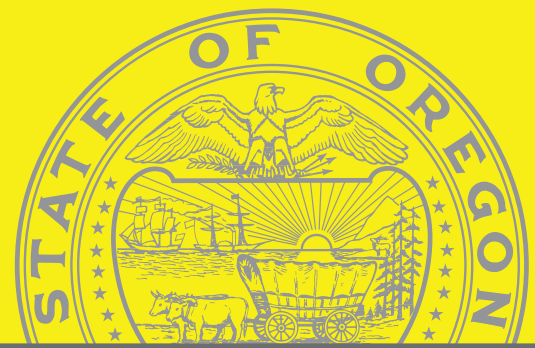
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