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## CORONAVIRUS

## State's marijuana economy faces new challenges

Some see a growing market under duress

By ZANE SPARLING  
Oregon Capital Bureau

They've never been higher. Oregon recreational marijuana sales have climbed to record highs, but some say the industry's woes also have reached an apex. The difficulties range from an unfavorable federal tax code to a dangerous crime wave, wildfires and cities and counties hungry for a larger slice of the tax pie.

"Businesses are still struggling," said Kim Lundin, the executive director of the Oregon Cannabis Association. "High sales don't transfer to overall industry success."

But the marijuana milestone — \$1.1 billion in sales in 2020, blowing past the \$795 million benchmark set in 2019 — has started a battle for cash at the state Capitol regardless.

State Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, has advanced legislation that would allow cities and counties to bump their marijuana sales tax from 3% to as much as 10%.

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Construction worker tests positive for virus at Astoria High School • A2  
County reports new virus cases • A6

## Resiliency station costs laid out in Gearhart

Project could exceed \$13M

By R.J. MARX  
The Astorian

GEARHART — City staff laid out the most complete look at a proposed resiliency station at High Point.

A new survey will be conducted to determine if voters are willing to get behind what could be a more than \$13 million project on North Marion Avenue.

"Ultimately it is up to Gearhart voters," City Administrator Chad Sweet told the City Council during a workshop on Tuesday.

Along with cost, there are a number of complications with the High Point site, City Attorney Peter Watts said. The Palisades Homeowners Association, which owns a right of way to the property, opposes the project and has indicated that they will litigate.

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Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Social workers help in the emergency department at Columbia Memorial Hospital.

## At Columbia Memorial Hospital, social workers have a role in care

### A recognition of behavioral health

By NICOLE BALES  
The Astorian

Recognizing a gap in mental health treatment on the North Coast, Columbia Memorial Hospital has placed social workers throughout its network, including the emergency department, to help patients in crisis.

The Astoria hospital, like Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, law enforcement and social services agencies, has seen an increase in people struggling with mental health. The lack of mental health treatment in the region has been at issue for decades, but has become more pronounced since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Columbia Memorial and Providence Seaside Hospital, the largest health care providers on the North Coast, are not designed to treat people with significant mental health or drug and alcohol abuse problems. But since many people in crisis end up in emergency rooms, the hospitals are on the front lines and are under greater pressure to intervene.

"We can't just separate behavioral and physical health out anymore. They are so intertwined and they impact each other so greatly," said Allison Whisenhunt, a clinical social worker who serves as Columbia Memorial's director of behavioral health, a new position. The hospital also hopes to recruit a psychiatric nurse practitioner.

"We partner really closely with Clatsop Behavioral Health on a lot of cases. And what we're trying to do really is fill any gaps that exist in the community," she said. "So it's not about competing with anybody else who's doing services. It's really filling the gaps where people aren't able to access services."

"So, for instance, the folks who don't have the kinds of insurance that



Hospitals are on the front lines of crisis response.

*'WE CAN'T JUST SEPARATE BEHAVIORAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OUT ANYMORE. THEY ARE SO INTERTWINED AND THEY IMPACT EACH OTHER SO GREATLY.'*

Allison Whisenhunt | a clinical social worker who serves as Columbia Memorial's director of behavioral health

Clatsop Behavioral Health accepts — trying to help make sure they still have access to behavioral health supports as well — has really been the focus."

*'There's always a lot of scrutiny'*

Social workers support the emergency department at Columbia Memorial seven days a week, 10 hours a day,

with a focus on behavioral health.

If there is a behavioral health crisis off hours then Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare — Clatsop County's mental health provider — comes in and helps conduct a behavioral health assessment. Every morning, social workers follow up on messages from the emergency department overnight.

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Some state lawmakers want to make it easier to convert hotels to emergency shelters or low-cost housing.

Pamplin Media Group

## Converting motels to housing

Idea in response to wildfires, housing shortage

By PETER WONG  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The conversion of hotels and motels to emergency shelters and low-cost housing would be eased under a bill that is halfway through the state Legislature.

House Bill 3261 would ease the conversion of hotels and motels purchased for emergency shelters or low-cost housing from land use challenges in cities and counties. Lawmakers made federal money available for such purchases last year under Project Turnkey, which is over-

seen by the Oregon Community Foundation.

The state House voted 41 to 12 on Wednesday to send the bill to the Senate.

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