

## ABORTIONS AMONG PEOPLE FROM CLATSOP COUNTY

The number of abortions among people from Clatsop County has remained relatively constant over the past five years, according to the Oregon Health Authority.



# Abortion access: Recent change by the federal government could expand local access to one type of abortion

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difficulties are compounded.

At Columbia Memorial, which is Lutheran-affiliated, obstetrician-gynecologists offer phone and office consultations when patients want to discuss abortion. The women's center provides information on abortion options and offers ultrasound and blood testing in advance. Patients can also follow up with health care providers afterward if needed.

Social workers and a board-certified chaplain are available to provide unbiased support and counseling throughout the process if patients pursue abortion.

The hospital also provides assistance with logistics, such as insurance, travel and financial issues. Staff is available to help manage potential complications or medical emergencies for patients who terminate pregnancies.

Providence Seaside, part of a Catholic health care system, declined an interview for this story.

Tracy Erfling, a naturopathic doctor who serves as Clatsop County's reproductive health provider, said she is not aware of any clinics or hospitals in the region that offer or plan to offer abortion services.

"It's a very big political hot topic," she said. "So some people just don't want to dip their toe in that pool and just would rather utilize the sort of functioning entities that are already there to do those services rather than try to take that on."

Without meaningful access, Planned Parenthood has said, "abortion is a right in name only."

Barriers to reproductive health care are often higher based on race, income and distance from urban centers.

"Oregon has worked very hard — even in more conservative parts of the state — to be a state where women and people who need abortions have complete and total access to that service free of charge," said Anne Udall, the president and CEO of Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette. "From sort of a financial support, Oregon is just truly one of the leaders in the country for sexual reproductive health care. We know that the rural parts of the state — it's much harder," Udall said.

Planned Parenthood has been focused on Eastern Oregon, she said, "but we are also increasingly paying attention to the lack of abortion access on the coast."

In Erfling's experience, the more rural a population, the more acceptable it is to have unintended pregnancies.

"If someone wants to have a kid, even if it's unintended, we all have to be OK with that because it's going to happen," she said.

But Erfling still thinks about a patient she saw 20 years ago: a pregnant 13-year-old who came into the county Public Health Department with her mom.

"I'll just never forget the look on her face," she said. "She just had this blank stare. I don't even think that information was filtering into her mind."

The teenager's mother was nonchalant about the situation, saying she and others she knew also got pregnant at a young age.

Education about contraception and the ability to have conversations about the options during pregnancy are critical, Erfling believes. In 2020, the county's reproductive health program averted 49 unintended pregnancies due to access to contraception, according to the Oregon Health Authority. In 2019, the county averted 59 unintended pregnancies.

The number of abortions among people from Clatsop County has remained relatively constant over the past five years. The Oregon Health Authority tracked 60 abortions in preliminary data from 2021, 46 in 2020, 47 in 2019, 64 in 2018 and 67 in 2017.

Oregon, like many states across the country, has seen abortions steadily decline over the past few decades.

"If the good teachings of contraception (are) out there, then this whole thing" — the question of abortion — "is potentially avoided," Erfling said.

### Medication abortion

A recent change by the federal government could expand local access to one type of abortion.

For women who are still early in their pregnancies, a medication abortion — achieved by taking the prescription drugs mifepristone and misoprostol — is an increasingly common method. Planned Par-

enthood, which provides about 75% of the abortions in Oregon, said most choose medication abortions.

Last year, the Food and Drug Administration lifted a restriction on abortion pills, allowing patients to have telemedicine appointments with providers who can prescribe and mail abortion pills directly to them.

Before the rule change, the first dose of the two-medication regimen was required to be dispensed at a health care facility.

In Oregon, some health care providers have already been conducting telehealth appointments and mailing pills through the TelAbortion Project, a research project authorized by the FDA.

The federal agency decided to stop enforcing the in-person requirement in April 2021, and in December it was lifted permanently, allowing the pills to be mailed directly to patients.

Reproductive health care experts say the decision could make access to abortion easier, particularly in underserved places like rural Oregon.

Restrictions on abortion in neighboring states could draw more women seeking to end their pregnancies to Oregon.

Idaho has sought to enforce an abortion ban after about six weeks of pregnancy by allowing family members to sue abortion providers. The law is modeled after a similar law in Texas that was crafted to get around constitutional protections.

"What Idaho is going to do is really shut down access for people in Idaho with this new law," Udall said. "We believe that we will begin to see high percentages of people coming into Oregon."

A report by the Guttmacher Institute, a research and policy organization that favors abortion rights, estimated that even a 15-week abortion ban could mean a 234% increase in the number of people whose nearest abortion provider would be located in Oregon.

Given the reality of abortion access in Oregon and the anticipated demand coming from other states, Planned Parenthood is providing medication abortions by mail. People who live out of state can access the pills if they provide an address in Oregon or Washington state, which can be a friend's house or clinic.

### 'A scary and stressful time'

If the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade, as a leaked draft of a ruling indicated, more than two dozen states are likely to

ban or significantly restrict access to abortion.

Oregon, Washington state and California have taken proactive steps to protect access.

The Reproductive Health Equity Act, passed by the Oregon Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Kate Brown in 2017, codified abortion into state law and required private health insurance plans to cover abortions with no out-of-pocket costs. The law also covers abortion services for undocumented immigrants. Bracing for an influx, new legislation this year established a \$15 million fund intended to cover, in part, the costs for patients who travel across state lines and the costs for abortion providers.

In Astoria, news of the Supreme Court's potential decision ignited something in Johnsen. Fresh in her memory was her own abortion and the lack of local resources she encountered.

In a matter of days, she launched the nonprofit Lemonade Foundation. She is still finalizing the nonprofit status, but the foundation's mission will be to help people who want to end a pregnancy through every step of the process: from scheduling appointments and organizing companionship so no one goes through a procedure alone to providing funds to cover things like transportation or child care.

Johnsen plans to reach out to other local nonprofits and find ways to connect with the people they see. She feels there are likely many in the community who don't know about the resources that are available to them or how to access those resources if they are considering an abortion.

"It can be such a scary and stressful time," she said.

With the Lemonade Foundation, Johnsen wants people who have chosen to or who need to end a pregnancy to know "that you are not just being denied care from every provider in our region. That there is someone here that is going to aid you with care and can connect you to care and be present for it."

This story is part of a collaboration between The Astorian and Coast Community Radio.

# Hyak: Lift would be able to hoist vessels weighing up to 1,500 tons

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investment in the site.

During the meeting, several shipyard owners and workers asked that the funding be denied or delayed for further analysis, claiming it would give Hyak an unfair advantage and harm other businesses on the river. They also questioned the amount of public funding going to the project.

Robert Dorn, Hyak's CEO, said the project would increase Oregon's shipyard capacity rather than cut into the market. He said existing shipyards cannot support the demand for repairs.

The meeting followed a six-month application review process by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Timo Toristoja, the owner and president of JT Marine, which has locations in Rainier and Vancouver, Washington, said the company recently purchased a dry dock for Rainier that will now be a wasted investment.

Dry-docking involves draining the water from a section of the port, which is a slower process than Hyak's lift, which would hoist ships from the water to an on-site repair area.

"I feel like we're fighting for our life here, and our very existence in this market," Toristoja said. "With our ability to do between 20 and 30 dry-dockings a year, Hyak will be able to do that at one time. Our average cost to dry dock a vessel is between \$10,000 and \$15,000. (Hyak) can do it in less than half that. So to try to say that it won't affect us is just crazy."

Frank Manning, the vice president of Diversified Marine in Portland, asked the commission to reject the funding request. He said that Dorn and partner Gordon Smith's personal wealth and successful business should be considered.

"It's going to cannibalize our existing market and — I beg you. I ask you respectfully that you consider this and reject the Hyak funding," he said.

Hyak's lift would be able to hoist vessels weighing up to 1,500 tons, allowing it to service boats that would otherwise travel out of state or join a waitlist. Hyak's application included letters of support from tugboat operators who say available dry docks haven't kept up with demand.

An independent economic impact study by the Columbia-Pacific Economic Development District, or Col-Pac, contracted by Hyak, included figures for Hyak's future spending and contributions at the site.

The study estimates the project will create 51 full-time jobs at Hyak upon installation, with an average salary of around \$78,000.

It also projects an additional 50 jobs five



Colin Murphey/The Astorian

Hyak Maritime hopes to create higher-paying shipwright jobs.

years after installation, bringing the total to over 100 full-time jobs.

The Col-Pac study predicts that the lift will add \$400,000 in annual local and state tax revenue by 2025 and \$700,000 annually by 2030.

At the meeting, Dorn pointed to the economic impact study and its finding of lack of shipyard capacity. He said he intends to collaborate with existing shipyards on the river.

"The state, to invest in this, is such a good investment. I assure every other operator of a shipyard on the Columbia River that we'll support them," Dorn said. "There's more work than we can handle. There may need to be another travel lift project in the Columbia River in the future. We'll support that. We'll support anything that can enhance the maritime repair ability, shipbuilding process here."

Following the public comments, Erik Havig, the Department of Transportation's statewide planning and policy manager, who oversaw the project funding selection, explained the review process and answered questions from commissioners.

Havig said that as the applicant, Hyak provided the economic information used in the impact analysis. The state relies on its economists, area commissions and review groups to determine how projects would impact the economy on a local, regional and state level.

"There's no way that ODOT can be experts — our economists experts — in ship repair. Nor would Business Oregon regional development officers be statewide experts in that industry, so they use the best information they have available," Havig said. "So it is not detailed, trying to dissect every claim, or every specific issue to that kind of level. That would take a lot more time, energy and cost."

Along with approving the funding, the commission also asked that the Department of Transportation carry out an informal review of the Connect Oregon grant selection process and revisit the application requirements, including the amount of public funding acceptable for each project.

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