

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

Better Health Care for Communities of Color

With this huge responsibility comes opportunity

BY MICHAEL ANDERSON-NATHE

Throughout our history, communities of color have faced multiple barriers to accessing health care, from systemic discrimination and cultural insensitivity, to the reality of unaffordability; these communities face more health-related hardships and an inequitable system of care. And despite Portland's progressive reputation, its history of racism perpetuates these experiences. But we can do better.

Health equity is achievable and requires deliberate action on our part. That's what we believe at Health Share of Oregon, where I serve as chief equity and engagement officer. I feel passionately that we can do more than just reduce barriers to care—we can eliminate health disparities.

Health Share is Oregon's largest coordinated care organization, or CCO, serving Oregon Health Plan (OHP) members in Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties. Beginning in February, Health Share started serving the majority of all OHP members across the tri-county area. That's over 300,000 children, adults and families and one of every three OHP members statewide.

With this huge responsibility comes opportunity.



By coordinating care for OHP members across the Portland metro region, we have the opportunity to streamline community investments and advance health and wellness based on region-wide data and through a health equity lens. We can ensure our provider network is meeting the needs of our community and act even more deliberately and thoughtfully to advance equity for our members. Further, we can reduce inefficiencies and redundancies, fortify community

ers that specialize in culturally specific care, including North by Northeast Clinic, Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center and the Native American Rehabilitation Association. We also provide technical assistance to health plans to help make their models of care more culturally relevant.

Health Share recently invested \$3.3 million to build necessary infrastructure to grow the Community Health Worker workforce and increase access to a culturally specific and community-based resources for Oregon Health Plan members statewide.

When kids are screened for developmental disabilities, they're more likely to access the support and care they need to prepare them for kindergarten and beyond. As part of our commitment to equity, we identified huge disparities in non-English-speaking communities, where many families are unaware of available screenings or their benefits. We're partnering with community organizations, including Early Learning Hubs, to increase our outreach to non-English-speaking families, provide more screening to kids and connect families with ser-

Health Share recently invested \$3.3 million to build necessary infrastructure to grow the Community Health Worker workforce and increase access to a culturally specific and community-based resources for Oregon Health Plan members statewide.

interventions, diversify our workforce, and identify best practices, resulting in better health, smarter spending and healthier people across the entire service area—the very vision of the coordinated care model.

Although there is much work to be done, I am proud of our efforts thus far. In particular, I'm proud of the ways we're putting equity into action:

We're proud to work with provid-

Treatment and care from peers who've been there: For people managing chronic diseases, working through mental health challenges or recovering from addiction, the support of a peer can lead to better outcomes and greater resiliency. We're working to make them an integral part of the health care system, in particular for communities of color.

Toward equity, from childhood on:

vices to help them learn, grow and thrive.

As we continue to advance health equity, we recognize how far we still have to go, but ultimately look forward to working with our members and Portland's diverse communities on this journey.

Michael Anderson-Nathe has led Health Share's equity and engagement team since 2014.

A Different Reality on the Ground in Our Cities

Proposals exacerbate the challenges

BY TONI HART

President Trump confidently declared that the state of the union is strong in his speech last week. But, as mayors, we see a different reality on the ground in our cities.

So far, the President's policy proposals haven't done enough to ensure that every American has an equal opportunity to



thrive. To the contrary, these policies are on track to exacerbate the economic, health, and employment challenges so many are struggling to overcome.

The President continues to promise that the recent tax reform bill will provide tremendous relief to families, but the bill mostly benefits the super wealthy and harms low-income Americans who will see their taxes increase overtime.

The President's tax bill actually harms American cities by eliminating critical funding generated by state and local tax deductions which funds infrastructure projects, and ensures

that citizens from a range of socio-economic backgrounds have access to the best possible educational opportunities. We cannot see how the President's plan will deliver on his promise.

On the campaign trail, and in President Trump's State of the Union address, he claimed that he will improve our nation's crumbling infrastructure. But, his budget proposal slashes infrastructure programs that are crucial to the continued vitality of our cities.

These infrastructure cuts include eliminating the Highway Trust Fund, and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which

serves as a lifeline for nearly seven million families in communities struggling to pay for basic energy needs.

Finally, the President maintained his rebuke of hardworking immigrants by citing criminals and gang members as the justification for his shameful immigration policy. Nearly 44 million immigrants currently reside in the U.S., over 20 million of whom are naturalized citizens.

Thirty six percent of U.S.-born children of immigrants are college graduates - five percent higher than the national average - and sixty four percent are homeowners, which is on-par with the national aver-

age. Immigrants are our neighbors, colleagues and friends.

They are productive members of our society struggling to thrive in a system stacked against them. It is un-American to attack them. And, that's why we are committed to protecting them when and how we can.

We look forward to working with the President on these and a host of other issues that are important to the sustainability of our cities, and the prosperity of our constituents.

Toni Hart is the mayor of New Haven, Conn., and the president of the African American Mayors Association on behalf of 500 black mayors across the country.