

A month to remind that mental health needs exist all year



KAREN
WHEELER

OTHER VIEWS

Since 1949, communities across our nation have observed Mental Health Awareness Month. The tradition has grown over the years and today, it's stronger than ever.

May is our official Mental Health Awareness Month, however, the need for attention to this important cause is a daily one. May also offers a special time of year for a pause — a time to reflect on how each of us can use our voices and partnerships to raise awareness about the importance of mental health in daily life.

During this month, Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc. is highlighting important efforts within the health and human services system to serve the behavioral health needs of communities throughout Eastern Oregon. The term "behavioral health" includes mental health, substance use and problem gambling in terms of the behaviors associated with these

conditions and how they impact a person's mind, body and spirit.

We are honored to join our providers in raising awareness about the significant role mental health has on one's overall health and wellbeing.

How far-reaching is the impact of mental illness? Most people have direct experiences with mental health — either they have needed support or they know someone who has such as family members, friends, co-workers and others. The data show:

- 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.
- 1 in 20 U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year.
- 1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year.
- 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people aged 10-34.

The COVID-19 pandemic further emphasized the importance of mental health in daily life. The additional stress it created is difficult to measure as seen by the impacts of increased isolation, employment reductions, financial impacts, family stressors and direct impact on

health for those experiencing the virus.

Now, as the laudable vaccination efforts continue throughout Eastern Oregon, it becomes increasingly important to consider how we are supporting each other as we start to find the "new normal." Understanding the impacts of the pandemic and reaching out for help are both important ways to take care of yourself, your friends and your family.

If you are in immediate danger, call 911. Lines for Life provides free, 24-hour crisis lines for people who are experiencing a mental health crisis, including suicidal thoughts. There also is help for those who are concerned about loved ones' substance use. You can find more information at www.linesforlife.org. If you need help for an urgent but not immediate matter, consider calling the David Romprey Warm Line at 1-800-698-2392.

Community mental health programs offer an array of behavioral health and support services in each Oregon county. These providers have 24/7 crisis lines and mobile crisis response teams; Eastern Oregon numbers are listed at www.eocco.com/members/crisis-help. They also provide support for people who are not "in crisis," but want emotional

health support with any of life's stressors.

Please remember: help is available. If you are struggling, or know someone who is, we want you to know that you are not alone, and you matter. Help is here as you are ready to reach out. The data shows how often mental health issues exist in our communities. Research data also shows treatment is very effective in helping people recover from mental health issues, or live a higher quality of life with chronic conditions.

By working together, and neutralizing the stigma of getting help, we can have strong, healthy communities where all individuals are supported in achieving health, wellness and their full potential.

We encourage you to assist us in sharing this important message with your friends, families and neighbors — not only during Mental Health Awareness Month, but in the months and years ahead.

Karen Wheeler is the chief executive officer of Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc., a nonprofit corporation that administers the behavioral health Medicaid benefit, non-emergent medical transportation and community engagement in 12 rural counties.

Oregon State, CCO partnerships to improve health in the state



DENNIS
BURKE

OTHER VIEWS

When you hear of the Oregon State University Extension Service, what comes to mind? For most of us, it is their long history of academic/rural partnering to improve local agriculture and natural resources.

While it is true the OSU Extension Service has a rich history of serving and improving local agri-business, it also is very involved locally in less visible but equally important ways that bolster local economies, expand education and add to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

OSU is a land-grant university founded through a series of federal acts in the late 1800s through which the government "granted" federal lands to states to be sold to fund or endow colleges for the purpose

of teaching practical agriculture, science and engineering. With a mission to research practical-solutions-to-real-problems, this academic and community partnership took education on improving rural life all over the state.

In the past, the Extension Service took demonstration trains, boats, trailer exhibits and other means to inform on improvements in technology, practice, application and other educational opportunities. This unique focus and mission continues today with the extra advantages of modern communication options.

OSU has extension offices in all 36 Oregon counties and is uniquely positioned to engage with Oregon's rural communities to cooperatively create solutions to their most challenging issues. As a part of this broad mission, OSU Extension Services is committed to improving health and health care delivery throughout our state. OSU's College of Public Health and Human Science recently established a Center for Healthy Aging Research where it is studying the impact of biological, psychological, social and physical

factors on the aging process with the purpose of helping people live longer, healthier lives.

It has been eight years since Oregon created its innovative Coordinated Care Organizations, a novel health care delivery system designed to reduce costs, improve patient experience and enhance the quality of care (the triple aim). Oregon's CCO's quickly recognized the need for new partners to create innovative solutions necessary to achieve their mission. For example, understanding how to most effectively access the health care system was identified as a major patient challenge, especially in rural areas. A partnership between OSU Extension, the Oregon State University College of Public Health and Human Sciences, OSU Professional and Continuing Education Office and the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization formed to provide quality training for Community Health Workers.

A CHW's role is to assist patients in navigating the complex structure of health care, improve compliance with care plans and assist patients in appropriate care follow up. Over the past five years the program has

trained nearly 200 workers who are practicing across the state. The creation of the CHW has been a very successful adjunct in workforce development meeting a need in a new and more effective way.

OSU's Extension Faculty's teaching and training capacity, whether on campus, in local extension offices or online, is extensive, combining academic skills-based knowledge and research with a needed local landscape perspective. This local training orientation makes the OSU program attractive to potential students.

It is my hope that I have expanded your understanding of the broad mission and objectives served by OSU's Extension Program. They provide a vital service in improving livability within our state and deserve our appreciation, encouragement and support.

Dennis Burke is the former president and chief executive officer of Good Shepherd Health Care System. Burke now does consulting work with Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization.

Reflecting on unity, strength through diversity



KELLY
FITZPATRICK

OTHER VIEWS

For the second year in a row, Memorial Day observances in communities, organizations and even within family groups will look very different later this month because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The parades, large ceremonies and other occasions, which I and so many others in the Oregon veteran community have always found moving and meaningful, have not yet been able to safely return in many places.

Yet, the importance of this day — and the emotions and memories that it brings — have not changed.

For countless families across our communities, our state and our nation, Memorial Day is a stark and, often, painful reminder of those loved ones who went to serve their country and never came home.

Whether they volunteered during a time of war, stood guard over our peace or never expected to wear the uniform until their draft card arrived — their service and selfless sacrifice represent the best and highest ideals that America has to offer.

We continue to feel their loss today.

In recent months, and particularly as we have approached this year's Memorial Day holiday, I have found myself reflecting on the themes of unity and strength in diversity.

It was just before the Korean War, in 1948, that President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981 — abolishing discrimination based on race, color, religion or national origin in the United States armed forces. When war broke out in 1950, our country entered the fray with a fully integrated and desegregated military.

I believe those who have served our nation in uniform know the meaning — and the value — of unity more than almost anyone else. We were trained to protect those on our right and those on our left — and to trust that they would do the same for us.

Every day in service, all that mattered was someone had your six and was there to offer a hand when you stumbled. Their color, nation of origin, religion or sexual orientation were not part of the equation.

After service, the diversity of our veteran community is a source of immense pride and strength. We are Black, white, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, men, women, transgender and nonbinary, young and old, urban and rural, of every race, religion and creed — unified through our shared service and sacrifice.

The honored ranks of the fallen include Sgt. John Noble Holcomb, who was born in Baker City. John was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his extraordinary courage and sacrifice during the Vietnam



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Oregon Army National Guard Sgt. Tavis Johnson positions a flag in the Avenue of Flags at the Hermiston Cemetery on Thursday, May 27, 2021, for Memorial Day.

War — where he single-handedly forced an enemy retreat, despite being mortally wounded, saving many American lives.

They include Erin McLyman, from Eugene, who proudly enlisted in the United States Air Force after recovering from a severe, years-long addiction to drugs and alcohol that began when she was in just her first year in high school. She later enlisted in the Oregon National Guard and was eager to deploy to Iraq. She died March 13, 2010, in an enemy mortar attack.

They include the 100th Infantry Battalion — which became known unofficially as the "Purple Heart Battalion." The unit was one of only two combat units during World War II that was comprised of second-generation Japanese Americans (known as "nisei") who had briefly had their rifles stripped away due to prejudice following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

They would go on to fight bravely in Europe, even as their families remained in internment camps back in the United States. The men of the 100th Infantry Battalion earned recognition as the most decorated American unit of its size and length of service. The 18,000 men who served earned nearly 9,500 Purple Hearts, 21 Medals of Honor and an unprecedented seven Presidential Unit Citations.

And the honored ranks of the fallen include Army Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe, who was the first Black service member to receive the Medal of Honor for service in Iraq or Afghanistan for the heroism he displayed after his Bradley struck a roadside bomb.

The explosion ruptured the Bradley's fuel cell, engulfing the vehicle and its occupants in flames. Enemy fire soon rained down on their position. But none of that stopped Sgt. Cashe from acting quickly to save his soldiers.

Drenched in fuel, he pulled the driver and five other soldiers from the burning vehicle — saving their lives, while suffering second- and third-degree burns over 72% of his own body. Despite this, he insisted on being the last person on a medical evacuation helicopter.

Sgt. Cashe died 22 days later — on Nov. 8, 2005. He was only 35.

It is impossible to know exactly what was going through the minds of Sgt. Cashe, Sgt. Holcomb, Pvt. McLyman, the members of the 100th Infantry Battalion, and so many other heroes as they made the ultimate sacrifice. But we who have served know they were motivated by the rare courage and devotion common to those who have borne the battle — to protect our nation, our loved ones back home and our fellow service members.

The harsh reality of war and conflict is that not everyone will make it home. Let us honor the memory of heroes no longer with us — not just on Memorial Day, but every day. And let us strive to live up to the incredible example they have set for all of us.

May we never forget our fallen heroes. They were the best our country had to offer, and their memory inspires us to be better. Their courage moves us. The world is a better place because of them, because they lived and because they served.

May we never forget what they sacrificed, and what their loved ones have lost.

Thank you for joining us today. And on behalf of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, I wish you and your loved ones a safe, reverent and meaningful Memorial Day.

Kelly Fitzpatrick is the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs and Gov. Kate Brown's policy advisor on veterans' issues. She is a retired Army officer.



ANDREW
CUTLER

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Holiday offers us a chance to remember

Memorial Day holds a special significance for me.

I joined the U.S. Army at a young age, did my time honorably, and then moved on in life. For me, at least initially, my service was something I did and got out of the way. I did not spend a lot of time reflecting on my time.

As I aged, though, and watched or covered numerous Memorial Day observances, I began to realize why the holiday is about more than hot dogs and backyard barbecues. I came to realize the holiday represents a time to reflect on loss and to celebrate the deeds of those veterans who served and those who died in the service of this great nation.

We live in a world seemingly constantly tortured by anxiety. COVID-19, wars on foreign shores, disruptions at home — it all can be overwhelming.

Yet, I think Memorial Day can be, and should be, a time to remember that in every stretch of our nation's history there have been those who freely gave up their comfort and, in some cases, potential fortune to step up and serve. Many of those men and women gave what Lincoln called "the last full measure of devotion" and are buried in cemeteries across the nation in sections reserved for our war dead.

The men and women who serve now, and served in the past, are truly the best we have. The ones who did not live to return home to see their loved ones deserve to be remembered. Their memories, their names, should not fade away into the empty halls of history. They gave the most precious thing of all — their lives — so our nation could continue to prosper and move ahead.

Their lives cannot be seen as lost in vain. And, in truth, they were not in vain.

We should all enjoy the upcoming long Memorial Day weekend. The weekend traditionally marks a clear dividing line between spring and summer, and summer, of course, always beckons with unrealized opportunity.

Yet we should, if we can, take a moment to recall why we can enjoy the long weekend and why the holiday is now, and should always be, important.

We cannot forget those who gave so much for our nation, and while hot dogs and barbecues are a lot of fun, in the end the holiday weekend is about remembering those perished for our democracy.

Andrew Cutler is the publisher/editor of the East Oregonian.