

# HEALTH

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“As Congress considers significant reforms to health insurance coverage, it is critical that such reforms do not undo the gains and progress we have made,” said Jett.

The progress has been felt by millions of Americans.

The American Psychiatric Association reports that 68 million Americans suffer from mental illness or substance addictions.

And according to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, since the establishment of ACA nearly 30 percent of those who got coverage through the nationwide Medicaid expansion were individuals suffering with a mental disorder. Those disorders can include anxiety, schizophrenia, or an addiction to substances such as opioids or alcohol.

These are among the country’s most vulnerable individuals — according to the APA — those most likely to suffer from poor mental health and addictions. They are most at risk of becoming homeless, incarcerated or committing suicide.

## Wraparound care

GOBHI CEO Kevin Campbell said that in his opinion the greatest loss, should the ACA be repealed, would be losing important parts of wraparound care. Such care, Campbell said, can dramatically improve the lives of both the mentally ill and their families.

Wraparound care provides integration and collaboration within the broader health system. This goal is to create security and access to community-based services to keep people with mental health issues out of jail or hospitals.

“This is important because early intervention saves lives and saves money,” said Jett. “As Congress considers significant reforms to health insurance coverage, it is critical that such reforms do not undo the gains and progress we have made to improve health, increase care and reduce cost — Oregon’s triple aim.”

## Jobs, Jobs, Jobs

To service the increase in individuals now able to access reliable care, it was necessary to hire and train more health-care workers

Since the ACA was implemented 23,300 new health

# WALLOWA COUNTY WRAPAROUND CARE

Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness has been able to “braid together” funding of integrated services since ACA went into effect.

Several Wallowa County residents have shared their stories of how this practice helped them. To protect their privacy, the Chieftain made the decision to withhold their names.

• One individual joined the Center for Wellness’s “Couch to 5k” walking group more than two years ago. Since that time, they have taken over leadership of the group, encouraged

peers to participate and made the group more accessible. In addition, this individual expanded the group from Enterprise to include Wallowa and Joseph. Through this process, this Medicaid member has lost weight, gained leadership abilities and improved their quality of life and for others in the group.

• Another client who was receiving mental health services suffered from disruptive sleep patterns and inconsistent food choices. This person wondered whether or not these two problems contributed to

their mental health issues.

Because of the availability of wraparound care through ACA, the individual received diet and exercise assistance and lost more than 100 pounds making better food choices and exercising regularly. They now reports better sleeping patterns, increased mobility and better mental health.

“This individual would not have realized these gains had it not been for the wrap around care they are now receiving through expanded Medicaid services,” said Chantay Jett.

care jobs were created in Oregon, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

Campbell reported that his group was funding more than 150 health care workers through their behavioral health provider network.

“Those jobs weren’t there three to four years ago,” Campbell said. “It’s not all about the money, it’s about the flexibility clients got in treatment. Our enrollment grew by over 60 percent. We went from 28,000 to 48,000 enrolled.”

## Expansion

Before the Affordable Care Act, the Oregon Health Plan was directed by the legislature to offer the children’s health improvement program (or CHIP) to all Oregon children who came from a family that had an income of double twice the national poverty line.

But few adults were covered by the plan, because the income limits were so low.

“There were a whole lot of kids with coverage through OHP and their parents didn’t have that coverage,” said Campbell. But after the ACA, the income levels were increased to all adults who made 138 percent of the poverty line.

There are major benefits when an entire family is involved in treatment, something that has been done in Wallowa County for many years through Wallowa County Together. And Campbell said that work must continue for the community to see the full social benefit.

But access to mental health wrap around care is not just for the severely mentally ill, or families with addiction or other functional problems.

Campbell notes there are times when individuals need temporary emotional help, and the ability to find that in a primary care setting is important.

“Adolescence is a horribly challenging time, after having a baby is another time,” he said. “There’s nothing wrong with you if you’re having difficulties, it’s perfectly normal to be stressed at this time and being able to refer people for mental health assistance or getting someone to come in and get help — that’s the magic that I’ve seen happening.”

## Cutbacks

Even if ACA is not repealed until 2020, as Republicans are currently suggesting, the danger of cuts to services remains.

Chris Bouneff, executive director of National Alliance on Mental Illness, discussed those threats in the alliance’s February report for staff.

“We knew the day was coming that the federal investment would decrease for this “expansion population” and that Oregon’s share would increase,” he wrote. “That day is now here.”

He said there is a great danger of “going back to the days when people in need received nothing, which put untenable pressure on emergency rooms, law enforcement, schools and just about every other public agency and community setting. There is no excuse to go backward.”

“We’ve got real challenges,” said Bob Joondeph, executive director of Disability Rights Oregon.

“Oregon does not stack up well in terms of youth illicit drug use, youth suicide rates, the number of adults receiving mental health care. We know statistically we’re a long way

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Chantay Jett

companies were mandated to provide a level of coverage that were not needed by many healthy people.

For instance, Fruits said a woman past child-bearing age does not need pregnancy services. Some older individuals do not want “extraordinary measures” to be taken should they have a heart attack or stroke, and may have advance directives stating the limits of care described.

“I think if we had insurance that was not so saturated with mandated benefits you might find you can afford it,” Fruits said.

But Fruits said he did not know how the Republican proposal would effect the mentally ill, but he thinks its an important part of the nation’s health care system.

“I am becoming more and more convinced that substance abuse disorder is a physical and mental issue that should but addressed in our health care system,” he said. “There are treatments that work. Some of the more effective treatments require medical intervention.”

The primary problem, according to Fruits, is economics.

“I’ve said that the state of Oregon can’t afford the Medicaid expansion as it’s written,” he said. “Oregon committed to this Medicaid expansion and knew the federal aid will be dialed back and never made any plans for that. People are correctly worried that if the Medicaid expansion is dialed back, a lot of people will lose coverage.”

According to the National Council for Behavioral Health, the rollback of expanded care would end coverage for approximately 1.2 million mental illness or addiction problems.

Nearly all of the country’s largest mental health groups have lined up against the legislation in its current form. The Mental Health Liaison Group, a group of more than 60 national organizations,

wrote a letter expressing “serious concern” about the new act and urging legislators to “continue to protect vulnerable Americans’ access to vital mental health and substance use disorder care.”

And Oregon’s poor and rural residents and those who are too young to qualify for Medicare, would lose the most under the Republican proposal, according to data compiled by the Kaiser Family Foundation and analyzed by the Lund Report.

That report analyzed residents of Wallowa County and found that 60 year olds with an income of \$20,000 would lose \$9,760 in tax credits; those with an income of \$30,000 would lose \$8,230; those with an income of \$40,000 would lose \$6,640. But those with incomes of \$75,000 and more would see a reduced tax burden.

A popular feature of the plan for many businesses is that it will end the requirement for employers of more than 20 individuals offer coverage to full-time employees.

The National Federation of Small Businesses came out in favor of the business considerations of the Republican proposal.

Other features of the new act, as proposed, include removing tax penalties for those who choose to go without health insurance. Insurers would also be allowed to increase premiums by 30 percent for clients who let their coverage lapse and then seek to reinstate. In addition, federal funds will be cut to Planned Parenthood clinics for one year.

Some parts will remain. Republican legislators say they will keep the prohibition on denying coverage to people with pre-existing conditions, ban lifetime coverage caps and continue to allow young people to remain on their parents health plans until age 26.

“There is no excuse to go backward,” said Chris Bouneff, director of National Alliance on Mental Illness

# SCHOOL

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But other courses, like the three-day weaving class, will be taught by visiting artists. North Carolina-based designer Amber Jensen will teach students who are as varied as the instructors in both geography and demographics.

“We’ve got some people signed on from here, others who are coming in just for the classes,” said Hennes.

Hennes said the nonprofit offers a 20 percent discount for Wallowa County residents. The costs of the courses vary, from \$65 for spoon carving, which includes all relevant materials, to \$295 for the weaving course.

Hennes got the idea for the school after attending the North House Folk School in Grand Marais, Minn., years ago. He learned timber framing skills there and saw what a valuable asset a folk school was to the community. He said it can offer a way for a community to preserve and important local youth the opportunity to find useful, lucrative careers. “I certainly see it that way,” said Hennes. “If we can find a young kid who just goes wild for timber building or something, it can offer them a way to make a living in their hometown.”

Hennes said he hopes to offer future courses in that vein, as well as boat building and field trips and other lon-

ger, more complex offerings. Hennes said he will work to not duplicate experiences already provided by the Josephy Center, Wallowa Resources and other local businesses.

The nonprofit is hosting some of the courses on the street-level event space beneath the Jennings Hotel. It also purchased a small brick building on W. McCully Street across from the hotel. Hennes said that the 600-square-foot structure will allow for some classroom space in the short-term, and the empty lot next door offers room to expand.

Hennes said at least 8 rooms will be available for rent at the formerly dilapidated downtown Jennings Hotel, and possibly as many as 11 by Memorial Day. Local contractors have been

working overtime on space that now includes a shared sauna, kitchen and baths.

A fundraiser for the folk school is scheduled for April 1 at the Jennings Hotel. The \$70 meal is produced by Tournant, a Portland-based, farm-focused company created by chefs Jaret Foster and Mona Johnson.

For more information on the folk school, visit [www.prairiemountainschool.com](http://www.prairiemountainschool.com) or call Hennes at 503-863-6757. You can also RSVP for the fundraiser dinner there as well.


— *Tim Trainor is interim editor at the Wallowa County Chieftain. Contact him at 541-426-4567.*

## ATHLETE OF THE WEEK


Joseph Charter School senior Ally Cooney is featured as this week’s athlete of the week. Cooney, 17 is a member of the JCS track and field team.

When the Eagles competed at the Mullen-Leavitt Invite track meet last week, Cooney was the only Eagle who won a first place at the meet. She made a winning leap of 32-02.75 for the triple jump.

Cooney also competes in volleyball, basketball, horse 4-H and FFA. She maintains a regular presence on the JCS honor roll and plans to attend Boise State University in the fall.



**Ally Cooney**



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## JOSEPHY CENTER FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

# WOMEN’S ART SHOW

## MARCH 4-28



JENNIFER KLIMSZA  
2017 PARTICIPANT

### SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

<p>OPENING RECEPTION MARCH 4, 7 PM</p> <p>BROWN BAG WOMEN IN NATURAL RESOURCES FEAT. PAT KENNEDY MARCH 7 AT NOON</p> <p>FILM SHOWING: ‘THE SUFFRAGETTE’ MARCH 8, 7 PM</p>	<p>WINE AND PAINTING (MUST PRE-REGISTER) MARCH 11, 4-7 PM</p> <p>WOMEN’S OPEN MIC MARCH 12, 4-6 PM</p> <p>BROWN BAG ART HISTORY FEAT. CHERYL COUGHLIN MARCH 14 AT NOON</p>	<p>ABSTRACT PAINTING WITH MELLICA MARCH 18, 10-4 PM</p> <p>BROWN BAG WOMEN’S HEALTH MARCH 21 AT NOON</p> <p>WVMA HOSTS WOMEN: MUSIC &amp; WORDS BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND! MARCH 25, 7 PM</p>
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