

The Register-Guard

Gov. Brown convenes Behavioral Health Advisory Council

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Gov. Kate Brown convened a Behavioral Health Advisory Council with Executive Order 19-06 on Thursday.

The council will make recommendations to the governor and the Legislature with a focus on care for adolescents and adults with serious mental illnesses, including those with simultaneous substance use disorders.

“Behavioral health systems remain largely fragmented and separate from the rest of health care, and we are not getting the outcomes we pay for,” the executive order reads. “We have fallen short of adequately addressing the unique needs of Oregonians with serious and complex behavioral health conditions.”

The order appeared hard on government inaction on behavioral health, including statistics such as only 45% of Oregon adults experiencing mental illness get treatment and likewise for only 11% addicted to illicit drugs. However, earlier this month, the executive director of the Alcohol & Drug Policy Commission, a state agency created by the Oregon Legislature, announced Brown told him she planned to take no action on the state’s untreated addiction crisis for at least a year.

At the time Oregon Recovers, a nonprofit advocacy group, described the choice to put off action as “deciding to kick the can down the road without providing an explanation as to why.”

Also at the time, the governor’s press secretary, Charles Boyles, said that the governor remained dedicated to the plight of addiction.

“It remains one of her top priorities to ensure that state agencies are taking the steps necessary to connect each of the thousands of Oregonians who struggle with addiction every day with the services they need,” Boyle said.

The advisory council is made up of legislators and various behavioral health service providers around the state, including Bend, Grand Ronde and Pendleton. Boyle said council membership was selected to represent a diversity of viewpoints and professional expertise, with a mix of urban and rural representatives. However, there is no representation from Lane County.

“Every person in Oregon grappling with a serious mental illness deserves access to the services they need, when they need them,” said Brown in a news release. “Whether from an urban center or a rural town, regardless of background or income level, every Oregonian needs to know that, as a community, we are here to support them on the path to healing.”

The council will meet monthly to create recommendations to create health equity across the state, as well as fast and effective treatment for mental health and substance use disorders.