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Dana Hepper

Policy advocacy for maternal and infant health

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Dana Hepper & Silke Akerson, MPH, CPM

OPC Annual Summit, October 16, 2026

My why - Silke

- Home birth midwife for 23 years
- Working at an individual level began to frustrate me
- The families I served kept running into structures, rules, policies that:
  - Didn’t support their health or basic needs
  - Sometimes actively harmed them
- The providers I knew kept running into structures, rules, policies that:
  - Didn’t support them in providing the best care
  - Didn’t support a safe, functional, sustainable maternity care system
- I wanted to see change!



My why - Dana

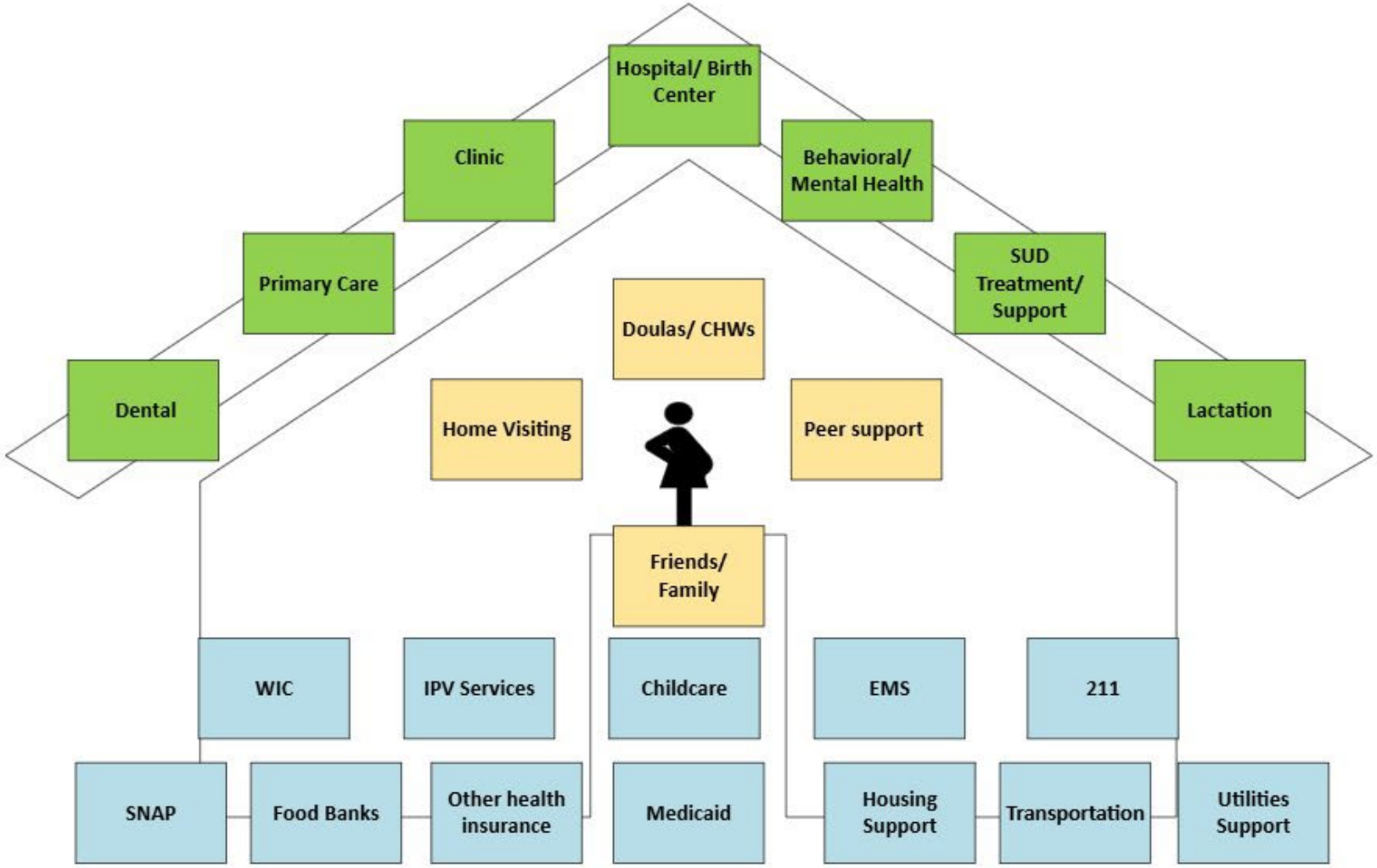
- Former elementary school teacher
  - Students, families, and teachers were challenged by system failures
- Political science major in college
- 10 years in K-12 children's advocacy
- Became a mom in 2010
  - Following 2 miscarriages
  - Then birth complications & NICU stay
- Importance of perinatal care & early childhood development was personal!
- 13 years in early childhood education, care & health advocacy



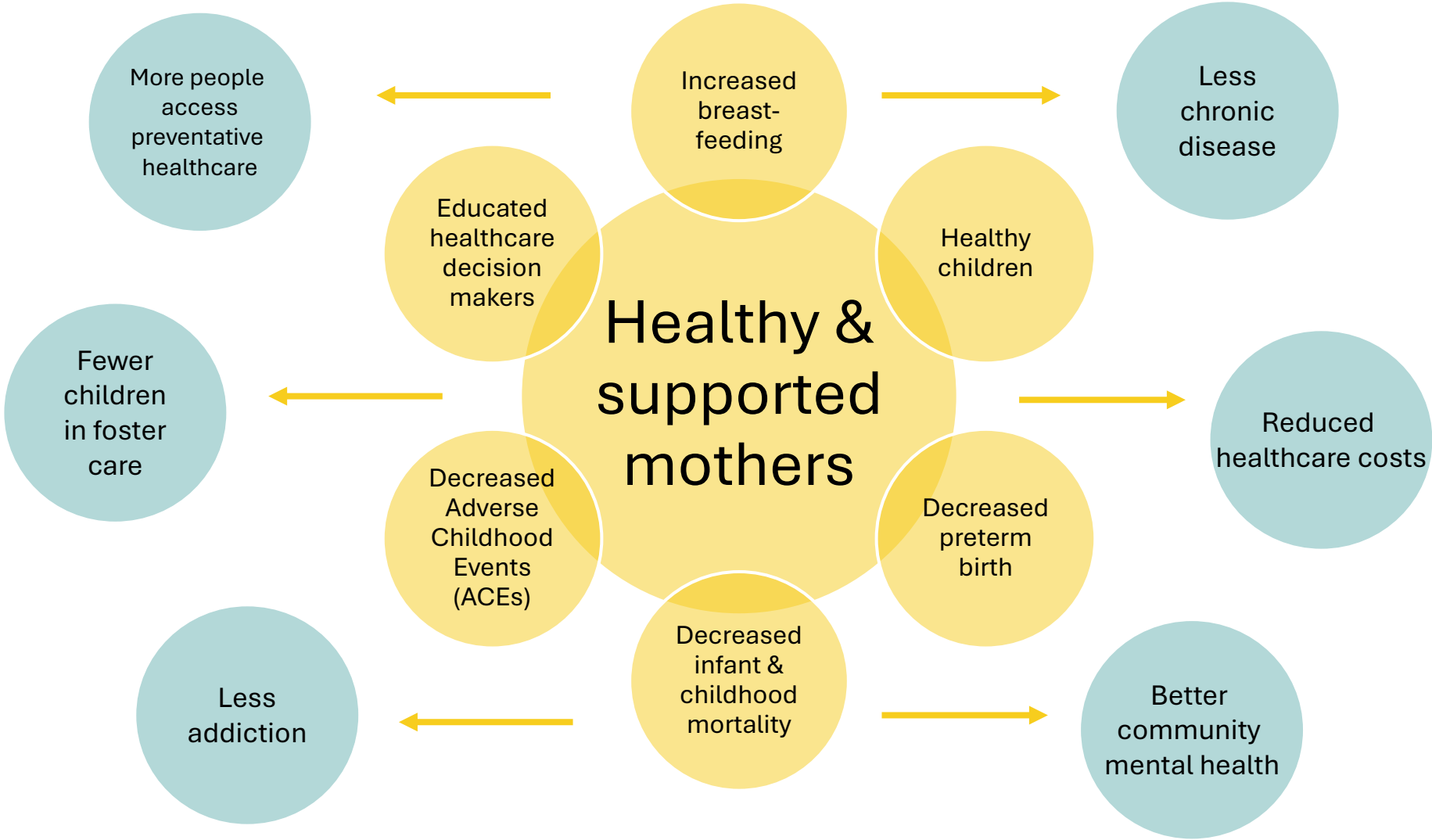
Why does policy matter?

- Policies shape the structures we develop, give birth, and parent in
  - Housing
  - Food systems
  - Social safety net
  - Transportation
  - Education
  - Healthcare payment
  - Healthcare practice
  - Quality & safety resources & practices

Policy shapes & funds the maternity care system



Why focus on maternal health?



Legislative Advocacy

Legislative Branch



Writes the laws & budget

Executive Branch



Implements the laws & budget

Judicial Branch



Interprets the laws

The Legislature

- **Senate & House [of Representatives]**
- **Senate**
  - 30 members who serve 4 year terms
- **House**
  - 60 members who serve 2 year terms
- **Legislature meets every year**
  - 5 month sessions in odd years (Feb – June 2027)
  - 5 week sessions in even years (Feb-Mar 2028)
- Write bills which can become laws
- Change existing laws
- Prepare the state's biennial (2-year) budget (in odd # years)



Your Legislators: find them here

Legislators are people, and they're elected to represent YOU!

https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/legislator-lookup.html

Health Care Leaders

Ways & Means Health & Human Services Sub Chairs
Sen. Wlnsvey Campos
Rep. Andrea Valderamma

Senate Health Care Policy Chair
Sen. Deb Patterson

Senate Early Childhood & Behavioral Health Policy Chair
Sen. Lisa Reynolds - Momnibus Champion

House Health Care Policy Chair
Rep. Rob Nosse

House Behavioral Health Policy Chair
Rep. Hai Pham

https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov

Who Can Advocate? YOU!

- **Your experience is needed to inform good policy decisions!**
- **You are an expert.**
  - **You know more on a topic than most elected officials.**
  - **We can help you connect your expertise to a specific policy.**
- **No action is too small.**









opc

Policy priorities for maternal & infant health

- Housing
- Food systems
- Basic income
- Paid parental leave
- Postpartum care & support
- Behavioral health access
- Access to midwives & doulas
- Continuity & coordination in perinatal health care
- Adequate payment for increasingly complex maternity care



Oregon Momnibus

- Led by Senator Lisa Reynolds
- Stakeholder process & steering committee
- 2025 Momnibus successes:
  - **SB 690**: Housing Stability - extra protections for families with young children facing eviction
  - **SB 692**: Perinatal Workforce/Doulas/Lactation Professionals - insurance coverage for doulas, lactation counselors - plus $1M to build workforce
  - **PLUS** – OPC funding
- 2027 Momnibus priorities
  - Perinatal SUD
  - Maternity care system/workforce
  - Safe care for immigrant families
  - Poverty mitigation
  - Home visiting programs
  - Folate enriched masa

Momnibus 2027
Improve access to perinatal SUD Care

- Support and grow programs which integrate perinatal/maternity and behavioral health care
  - Improve coordination of services to increase access
  - PMPM for Nurture programs
  - Braided funding stream for residential treatment
  - Hospitalization for medication stabilization during pregnancy and postpartum
  - Ensure access to stable housing for families in recovery

Momnibus 2027
Maternity care system/workforce

- Establish maternity care system taskforce to make recommendations to create a statewide, coordinated, sustainable system of maternity care including:
  - Maternal levels of care work
  - Planning for L&D closures and crises
  - Payment reform for pregnancy, birth, and postpartum care to provide adequate reimbursement for complex care
  - Sustainable growth of the clinical maternity care workforce
- Nurse staffing ratio flexibility for low-volume labor & delivery units
- Loan forgiveness for rural OB and newborn providers
- Fund OR AHEC local workforce development in high school
- Pilot funding for doulas to become clinicians

Momnibus 2027
Safe care for immigrant families

- Ensure HOP coverage mirrors OHP coverage of maternity care as coverage transitions to open card system
- Direct OHA to draft rules for coverage of interpretation services for doulas, traditional health workers
- Protect privacy of personal information for pregnant and birthing people accessing care

Momnibus 2027
Poverty Reduction

- Oregon Kids Credit (2023)
  - Current status: Oregon offers a $1000 tax credit for children 0-5 years old for families making $25K or less (sliding scale between $25k-$30K)
  - Tax credit sunsets in 2028 - must renew in 2027 session
  - Exploring expanding credit amount to benefit more babies and families
- Cash to low income families - modeled after RxKids
  - Monthly payment during pregnancy and 12 months postpartum
  - Soft launch in 3 counties
  - Universal access

Momnibus 2027
Improve home visiting system

- **Home visiting** is a proven strategy but currently only reaches 8-18% of families who could use support
- 30-year history of state investment in home visiting
- Stakeholders have been working on how to better coordinate and strengthen the home visiting system (through CCOHVS & ELC)
- System lacks statewide structure for ensuring accessible pathways for families or coherent outcomes data
- Current placeholder bill while we gather input this fall on:
  - Coherent governance & financing
  - Workforce support
  - Family access & navigation to programs
  - System outcomes, data & reporting

How to Advocate

(1) Identify what you want to advocate for

(2) Craft your story

(3) Share with Legislators by:

- E-mail or phone call to legislator office
- Legislator townhall meeting
- Attending a lobby day with an organization
- Legislator meeting (in person or virtual)
- Written public testimony
- Verbal public testimony



Crafting your story

- Your name and your connection to the issue
- Bill number and/ or budget ask
- Why the bill or budget allocation is important to you – why does it matter?
- Your ask: Will you support xyz?
- Thank you!

Open ended worksheet

More scripted worksheet

What can this look like?



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Testimony Template

Chair X, Vice Chair X, and members of the committee,

My name is [YOUR NAME], and I am a [PARENT/PROVIDER/ETC.] at [INSTITUTION/ ORGANIZATION]. I am writing in support of [HB/SB XXXX: NAME OF BILL], which will make important investments in early childhood.

[TELL YOUR PERSONAL STORY HERE]

[WHY DO YOU CARE ABOUT XXX?]

Thank you for your time, and I hope that I can count on your support of [HB/SB XXX: NAME OF BILL]. Children cannot wait any longer!

Open ended worksheet

More scripted worksheet

Adcocacy Resources

- Oregon Legislator lookup https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/legislator-lookup.html
- Your Story worksheet: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1umb3ilDf9K7XFm8SG1igChZOM_LWD-Ix91K2DHqu0tk/copy
- Another Share Your Story worksheet option: https://childinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Share-Your-Story-Template_ENG-2.pdf

MCH Policy Resources

- National Partnership for Women & Families nationalpartnership.org/
- Black Mamas Matter Alliance Policy Agenda blackmamasmatter.org/policy-agenda/
- Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health policycentermmh.org/maternal-mental-health-policy-roadmap/
- Georgetown Center for Children & Families https://ccf.georgetown.edu/tag/data-tracking/
- Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2025/



Questions?