



**Linn  
County**

# NEWS



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## Commissioners boost Mental Health staff salaries

ALBANY — In a continuing effort to attract and retain qualified staff within the Linn County Mental Health Department, Commissioners Roger Nyquist and Will Tucker approved wage increases of about 5 to 10% for Mental Health I and Mental Health II Associates during their Tuesday morning board meeting.

Commissioner Sherrie Sprenger was not present.

This is the second wage increase within the Health Department in the last two months. At the Board's May 28 meeting, the commissioners increased pay range classifications by 15% for the Qualified Mental Health Professionals, staff with Masters Degrees.

The funding is primarily from the State of Oregon through the local Coordinated Care Organization.

Health Director Todd Noble told the commissioners that the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to unprecedented mental health issues nationwide. The increased needs have created pressure on current Mental Health staff and also made it more difficult to acquire new employees.

Noble said there are 122 total Mental Health positions in the annual budget, which is up from 96 in 2022,

The county has 26 Qualified Mental Health Professionals on staff, but another 19 positions are vacant.

Noble said the need is especially acute for the QMHP category. They have Master's Degrees and are thera-

pists who do assessments and treatments such as counseling.

"The pandemic was so disruptive," Noble said. "We have great workers, but it was a very difficult time for them. We are grateful to be able to recognize their work with these increases."

Board Chairman Nyquist said that due to COVID-19, the demand for Mental Health services basically doubled and the county's actions are recognizing the rule of supply and demand when it comes to labor and providing need services.

"We believe this will help not only retain our staff members, but also help us fill those vacant positions," Nyquist said.

Commissioner Tucker agreed.

In other business, the commissioners:

- Were informed by Dr. Adam Brady that there were 87 deaths in June and 51 births — 27 girls and 24 boys.
- Approved an intergovernmental agreement with the Department of Corrections to provide pass-through funding not to exceed \$487,000 from the Criminal Justice Commission's Justice Reinvestment Program. The funds will support a Probation Officer Liaison who will provide Prison Re-Entry and Downward Dispositional Departure offenders via shelter beds, housing assistance, trans-

portation and ID cards.

- Approved a Personal Services Contract with the Pelton Project for \$150,000 for two years to help mental health clients access their maximum level of independence and reside in the least restrictive and most independent community setting as possible.
- Approved a Student Affiliation Contract with Linfield College to assist students in the Bachelor's and Master's level nursing degrees.
- Approved a Personal Services Contract with Family Tree Relief Nursery in pass-through funding of \$259,134 from the Criminal Justice Commission's Justice Reinvestment Program. This will allow Family Tree to provide Peer Recovery Mentors to Department of Corrections and Drug Court clients.
- Approved advertising for bids to roof the 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. Medical Building.
- Appointed Brandon Fountain to the Ambulance Service Area Advisory Committee as the law enforcement representative.
- Approved First-Time Youth Wage agreements with Cook Family Farms and RAM Trucking.

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