



Commissioner Nick Fish
City of Portland

September 26, 2018

It is an honor to join you all today, and congratulations to all of today's honorees.

In my allotted 5 minutes, I hope to make the case for renewed public investment and bold public policy to address our homeless and addiction crisis – and to encourage you to continue to support DePaul's good work. Here goes!

First, a personal story.

A year ago, I learned I have stomach cancer. Cancer doesn't discriminate. 15 million Americans bravely face cancer every day, and half of Americans will be touched by cancer in their lifetime. But I am one of the lucky ones. Good health insurance. Great doctors and nurses at the Knight Cancer Institute. A loving and supportive family and community. And a safe roof over my head.

Now, imagine facing cancer while living on the streets. Then imagine suffering from depression, and self-medicating with alcohol, meth, or heroin.

It's a lethal combination – homelessness, coupled with two or more chronic illnesses, including addiction. And it helps to explain why 80 people died on our streets in 2016.

So what can we do about it? Here are 5 things:

1) We need a comprehensive, state-wide program to address addiction. You know the statistics.

- Oregon has the fourth highest addiction rate in the US: 9.55% of people 12 or older.
- Oregon ranks 50/51 in terms of access for people who need treatment.

While we have come to understand that addiction is a chronic disease, like cancer or heart disease, our system is fractured and incomplete, and we invest too little at every level of care.

In the future, we must focus on prevention, treatment on demand, and recovery support. Working with Mike Marshall and Oregon Recovers, a statewide coalition, Governor Kate Brown has set a big goal – to reduce the addiction rate from 9.55% to 6.28% in 5 years and to improve recovery rates. She deserves our full support.

2) We need more housing. At every income level. But especially for working families, older adults on a fixed income, people with a disability, and the formerly homeless.

Here are two of my priorities:

First, we need to boost the supply of supportive housing in our community. As a quick refresher, supportive housing combines a deeply affordable and safe home with intensive services for people struggling with mental illness, addiction, or both.

I'm proud that the City of Portland and Multnomah County have stepped up and committed to a shared vision of 2,000 new units by 2028. And last week, we adopted a framework for how to pay for it.

Supportive housing isn't cheap. It costs around \$60 per night. But the cost of not placing vulnerable people in supportive housing is even higher.

Consider these numbers:

\$210 for a bed in Multnomah County Jail. \$500 for an emergency room visit. \$900 for a night at the hospital.

Second, we need a regional approach to the housing crisis.

3) We need to defend affordable, inclusive, and accessible healthcare. Too many families in America are one healthcare emergency away from bankruptcy, losing their homes, or worse. In the richest country on Earth, this is morally indefensible.

4) We need to oppose any efforts to make people with a pre-existing condition second-class citizens in America. When I hear Senators debating healthcare and pre-existing conditions, I now

realize they are talking about me – and many of you. We can't go backwards.

5) And we need to support DePaul. One third of DePaul's clients are homeless. They get great outcomes. But every year, DePaul has to fundraise just to keep their doors open.

DePaul checks all my boxes for supporting local non-profits:

- Strong leadership – both the staff and board.
- Well-respected in the community.
- A track record of changing lives.

One last thing. Let's say you are suffering from donor fatigue. Or you are frustrated with the all homeless camps. Or you are uncertain about the future and skeptical about whether any of us can make a difference.

Here's the plain truth. The current system is broken, too expensive, and won't get the job done.

If we can move to a healthy system with upstream investments and broader coverage, we will save money while getting better outcomes.

And if we don't raise our voices – who will?

So, today, I urge you to support the good work of DePaul and to give generously. And tomorrow, let's get back to work fighting for systems change, affordable housing, a healthcare system that works for all of us, and the most vulnerable people in our community.

Thank you.