

## Virginia Garcia Memorial Health Center, Candidate Questionnaire

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Position: Yamhill County Commissioner, Position #1

Candidate: Casey Kulla

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*What is the role of the county in addressing health issues? If you believe the county has an increasing role to play, where will the revenue come from to pay for these potential services?*

Officially, as I understand it, the state shares responsibility with the county to deliver health services, along with providing some of the funds to pay for those services. The county has responsibility, shared or solely, for senior services, alcohol and drug treatment, children and family services, services for the developmentally disabled and for mental health care, health planning, public health, veteran services and environmental health. Whew... that's a long list of mandated services. But, ultimately, the role of the county (and its commissioners) is to improve the health and wellbeing of county residents and to improve the natural world upon which our health is based.

My view is that the county is called to improve the health of every single person in Yamhill County, paralleling the work that VGMHC does, but on a wider scale. For example, to improve *access* to health services that already exist and are covered by Yamhill County Coordinated Care Organization (such as a visit to Virginia Garcia), the Yamhill County Transit Authority can change its routes so that Virginia Garcia is a stop, and can include more frequent routes through the West Valley so that residents can get to appointments more easily at clinics where they are already patients and have appointments. The county can mandate this change in their upcoming operating contract that they have put out to bid; it may cost a bit more, but the county has the funds to do this, right now.

If we are intent on improving health in the county, we can also *bring* care-providers to people, in certain situations. For example, people who need mental health care from the county or through LCS can be overwhelmed by the process of making an appointment, remembering to go at the right time and the right place, and then getting to the appointment. Bringing services directly to them can improve health, and we can work with Oregon Health Authority, YCCO and Yamhill County Health and Human Services to add this service to the contract. Again, the cost can be shared by both state and county funds (and the county has money do cover their portion).

Improving air quality, access to recreational opportunities/open space and access to good, nourishing food are also important steps to improve county resident health.

Air quality, while a shared responsibility of the county and state, does not need to be costly. We can share the work with farmers, landfill operators and by working toward cleaner diesel engines in our county. The air quality in summer can be improved as well by taking a proactive approach to wildland fire management; specifically by making our communities wildfire-resistant, by prescribed burning in the fall and spring during conditions of air movement, and by thinning overcrowded commercial timberlands.

Access to recreational opportunities and open space is a shared responsibility, and the county needs to invest more in their own park management, expansion and marketing (we need to invite people to use our parks, in part). The county spends little on our parks, so even doubling the budget would have little impact on the county's total budget (we spend nearly as much to pay for commissioners to travel as we do on county parks).

Finally, nourishing food is key to improving and maintaining health. Virginia Garcia does a great job of educating patients about nutrition and providing nourishing food, but I would bet you would be able to provide more and reach more with the county's support. As a vegetable farmer in the county, I know how important good food is to complete health. We need to work with county farmers and processors and YCAP to make sure that the nourishing products of our county get to everyone who wants them and to make sure that people know how to prepare whole foods and that they have access to a kitchen for preparing whole foods. Eating well is good for both maintaining and improving health! We can enlist the state in this work, too, since good food must become part of the Oregon Health Plan in order to actually sustain improvements in health.

*How will you work to address social determinants of health in Yamhill County?*

One social determinant of health is fear of deportation for people and their friends and family members. How can we be healthy when constantly in fear? Cortisol, a hormone involved in the stress response, can degrade your health over time. Further, fear of deportation and of authorities can limit access to health care that exists, simply because a person may be scared to reach out, to step out, to seek access.

I have proposed that Yamhill County follow the lead of the Metro government, which is funding a program to improve the immigration status of everyone who resides in the three counties. Presently, Lutheran Community Services has an immigration legal program. I propose that the county fully fund the legal services that LCS already provides, to reach as many county residents as they can, including marketing campaigns and communicators. The economic benefit alone would be worth the expense, let alone the health improvements!

Poverty is another social determinant in the county that needs to be addressed. We cannot have healthy people without lifting people out of poverty. I realize that the county must work with the federal and state governments on reducing poverty, but

we can take action. We can provide the opportunities for satisfying, financially-sustainable employment in every community, and we can help people in our communities become entrepreneurs by both providing spaces for making ideas into products and by providing business start-up education and grants (we already award small grants through the economic development program, but expanding the reach and the pool of applicants is important to me). One wine industry program that I just learned about gives harvest crew members the opportunity to intern during crush, in order to start the process of getting more crew members into the winemaking side of the industry, rather than just the seasonal picking work.

Child abuse and adverse childhood experiences can re-inforce inter-generational trauma, and keep people unhealthy. Reducing child abuse and adverse childhood experiences will improve health. If we reduce the rates of abuse and the resulting ACE scores, we will improve health! The work done at *A Family Place* is a great example: their respite program and nursery and classes reduce child abuse. The county can provide the funds to purchase and build out spaces in every community for respite, nursery and classes. While this is a sensitive topic, we know that Virginia Garcia's counseling to younger women and making birth control accessible will raise the age at first pregnancy, and increasing a woman's age at first birth will improve her life and educational attainment and income prospects, and by relationship will reduce adverse childhood experiences for her children.

*How do we/should we measure success in health care?*

We should measure success holistically! Success should be measured in improved graduation rates, reduced ACE scores, reduced child abuse convictions, more user-days at local parks and pools, fewer people with diabetes and other chronic diseases, fewer people with chronic mental health challenges, and more people above the poverty line. We will see success in cleaner air and in fewer families with uncertain immigration status!