



Promoting Health. Building Community. Creating Opportunity.

February 9, 2021

Dear Honorable Senator Kate Leiber, Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means
SubCommittee on Human Services

Honorable Representative Rob Nosse Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Ways and Means
SubCommittee on Human Services

The 2020-2024 vision of Oregon's State Health Improvement Plan is, "Oregon will be a place where health and wellbeing are achieved across the lifespan for people of all races, ethnicities, disabilities, genders, sexual orientations, socioeconomic status, nationalities and geographic locations."

After 2020, with the COVID pandemic still raging and statewide wildfires still smoldering, and our neighborhoods exposed to increased violence and vandalism, I venture to say there is no way Oregon can achieve this vision without a fully funded collaboration among all parties involved in promoting statewide health. Public health modernization must be fully funded to restore a positive health trajectory for our state.

Public health modernization plays a critical role in promoting and protecting the health of our paralysis community. We are active despite our disability. We own businesses and hold entry-level to executive-level jobs; we ski, bike and hike on our mountains, and we have families, homes and worry about raising our children well.

The paralysis community in Oregon is vibrant, diverse, and robust. Nevertheless, living with paralysis comes with inherent risks to our health that organizations like Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection mitigate through its programs and services. Many of our community have compromised health and weak respiratory systems. We have limited mobility and use specialized wheelchairs that can make using transportation challenging. Many in our community also employ and manage a team of in-home care workers who frequently are family members; and we all use PPE on a daily basis for clean procedures like placing catheters and respiratory tubes, even before COVID.



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When health systems, services, and resources are strained or depleted due to statewide emergencies or the pandemic triggered by climate change and globalization, disruptions to supplies and services threaten the health of our community first and foremost. For example, the run on PPE during COVID caused many in our community who use them for clean procedures to go without, risking infection. It also drove up costs putting financial strain on many who are on limited incomes; and many people with vulnerable health who employ in-home care teams were forced to reduce their staff to one person to protect their bubble, which put an extraordinary strain on their family members. Those with few or no family members even risked exposure to COVID because they could not go without care. Risks like these can be avoided or minimized with a robust public health system that collaborates with community-based organizations like ours. We protect our community and promote health among our families.

Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection employs community health workers to promote and protect health for members of our community who live in congregate living settings and remote rural areas, Spanish- and Arabic-speaking families, those with underlying conditions like weak respiratory systems, and the whole of our community from being exposed to COVID 19 and wildfires. Our organization provides health education, access to technology, and PPE. Our CHWs help families get access to groceries, rent assistance and improve access to healthcare providers and the vaccine. We are busy protecting our communities but we need your help to fund this work.

Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection received funding from Oregon Health Authority's Community Outreach and Engagement program to protect and equip this community to stay safe during the COVID pandemic and wildfire air pollution. Without this funding over 1000 families would not have received critical resources like PPE, access to critical health information through technology and internet services, food bank assistance, rent assistance, securing accessible housing, or durable medical equipment like temporary wheelchairs, catheters, and even hospital beds. After the devastating Oregon wildfires, we distributed temporary wheelchairs, durable medical equipment, and PPE to members of the disabilities communities housed in temporary



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shelters. We sourced an adjustable hospital bed for an immigrant with quadriplegia and have helped members find housing, transportation, and education opportunities.

Public health services and community-based supports strengthen the fabric of our Oregon communities and make living an adaptive lifestyle in an able-bodied society as seamless and easy as possible. Community-based organizations like Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection, Oregon Paralyzed Veterans of America, and QUAD Inc, among many others, partner with the Oregon Health Authority, local public health authorities, DHS, CCOs, and our health system at large, to provide the programming and services our community needs to lead productive, healthful lives. On behalf of the spinal cord injury community in Oregon, thank you for supporting HB 5024 for Public Health Modernization. Without a robust public health system that collaborates with community-based organizations there is no way our State can achieve its health equity vision.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "West Livaudais". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "W" and "L".

West Livaudais

Executive Director

Oregon Spinal Cord Injury Connection