



**Senate Committee on Labor & Business
Testimony in Support of SB 1545
Submitted by Andrea Meyer, Director of Government Relations, AARP Oregon
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The Campaign for Oregon's Seniors & People with Disabilities ("the Campaign") is a coalition of organizations including consumers, labor, business and other concerned Oregonians advocating for the independence, dignity, choice and safety of older adults and people with disabilities. **We come together to convey our shared vision of Oregon and to make recommendations on transformative investments in long-term care to ensure a healthy future in Oregon as seniors are among the fastest growing demographic in the state.** We urge passage of SB 1545, the Future Ready Oregon workforce development investment package.

Our health care workforce is in crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated staffing shortages across healthcare settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, and home and community-based care. Health care workers, both those who are licensed and unlicensed, are experiencing burnout, mental health challenges, and the lasting impacts of combatting the pandemic firsthand. Oregon's most recent employment data show an unprecedented mismatch between a large number of job vacancies and relatively few jobseekers. Health care has the largest number of vacancies of any sector.¹ Seniors and people with disabilities are among those who are most affected by these staffing shortages, including as residents living in care facilities, at home with caregivers, as consumers of health care, and in their capacity as older workers.

Even before the pandemic, Oregon was not prepared to care for its steadily aging population. Baby Boomers will increase the demand for services, placing strain on our systems. By 2028, the number of personal care workers will need to grow by 28%, home health aides must grow by 29%, and the number of registered nurses working in Oregon will need to grow by as much as 15%.² To meet both the current strain and future demand, our state must make meaningful investments **now** to support our delivery of health care to seniors and people with disabilities.

¹ Oregon has more job openings than unemployed people, exacerbating hiring squeeze. January 19, 2022. The Oregonian. <https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2022/01/oregon-has-more-open-jobs-than-unemployed-people-exacerbating-hiring-squeeze.html>

² Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018). Long Term Occupational Projections (2018-2028). Projections Central. "State Occupational Projections." Available from: <https://www.projectioncentral.com/Projections/LongTerm>.

SB 1545 is one strategy to address this need by investing in health care job training and education opportunities that meet workers where they are in our communities. It will create innovative opportunities for statewide grants that will address urgent workforce needs, leveraging and scaling programs with a proven track record of success as well as providing funding for new programs. Finally, the package will meet the growing needs of our diverse population of seniors and people with disabilities by prioritizing investments in people of color, women, people with low incomes, rural communities, and Veterans.

Oregon's seniors and people with disabilities cannot afford to wait for innovative workforce investments. We urge you to support SB 1545 and move it to Joint Ways & Means for further consideration.