

Presentation to the 2023 Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

# Oregon Commission for the Blind

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Executive Director

February 16, 2023

# OUR MISSION

EMPOWER OREGONIANS WHO ARE BLIND TO FULLY ENGAGE IN LIFE

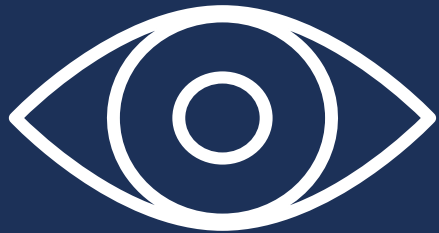


Our foundation:

# AGENCY PRINCIPLES

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## VISION



Blindness Without Barriers:  
A state of inclusion for  
Oregonians with vision loss

## KEY GOALS



- Engaged & Proficient Team
- Effective Education & Outreach
- Operational Excellence
- Exemplary Service
- Successful Client Outcomes

## VALUES



- Operational Excellence
- Customer Service
- Professionalism
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Leadership
- Integrity

# Oregon Commission for the Blind

## Historical Context:

Portland School for the Sightedless was founded in downtown Portland. It was the first Oregon agency to serve adults who were blind.

1913

First Business Enterprise Program Unit Established at Bonneville Power Administration.

1940

Established the Summer Work Experience Program (SWEPE).

Commission was restructured to be consumer driven.

1973

Oregon School for the Blind was closed. Students now receive school-based educational supports.

2009

1937

Established Commission for the Blind with statewide responsibilities.

1957

Portland headquarters built using donated resources.

1985

Established Salem SWEPE utilizing Supported Employment model.

2014

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act legislation passed.

Staying on mission:

# KEY SERVICE OBJECTIVES

Help



**Oregonians  
who are  
blind**

get and keep jobs that allow them to support themselves and their families.

Train



**Oregonians  
new to  
vision loss**

on skills related to living with blindness such as white cane travel, braille, adaptive technology and activities of daily living.

Aid



**Senior  
Citizens &  
Individuals**

who experience vision loss to acquire adaptive skills so that they may remain independent in their homes and active in their communities.

Support



**In-school  
youth who  
are blind**

as they transition from high school to further education, training and employment through provision of pre-employment transition services.

Assist



**Business  
Owners who  
are blind**

to obtain licenses and operate food service and vending businesses in public buildings throughout the state.

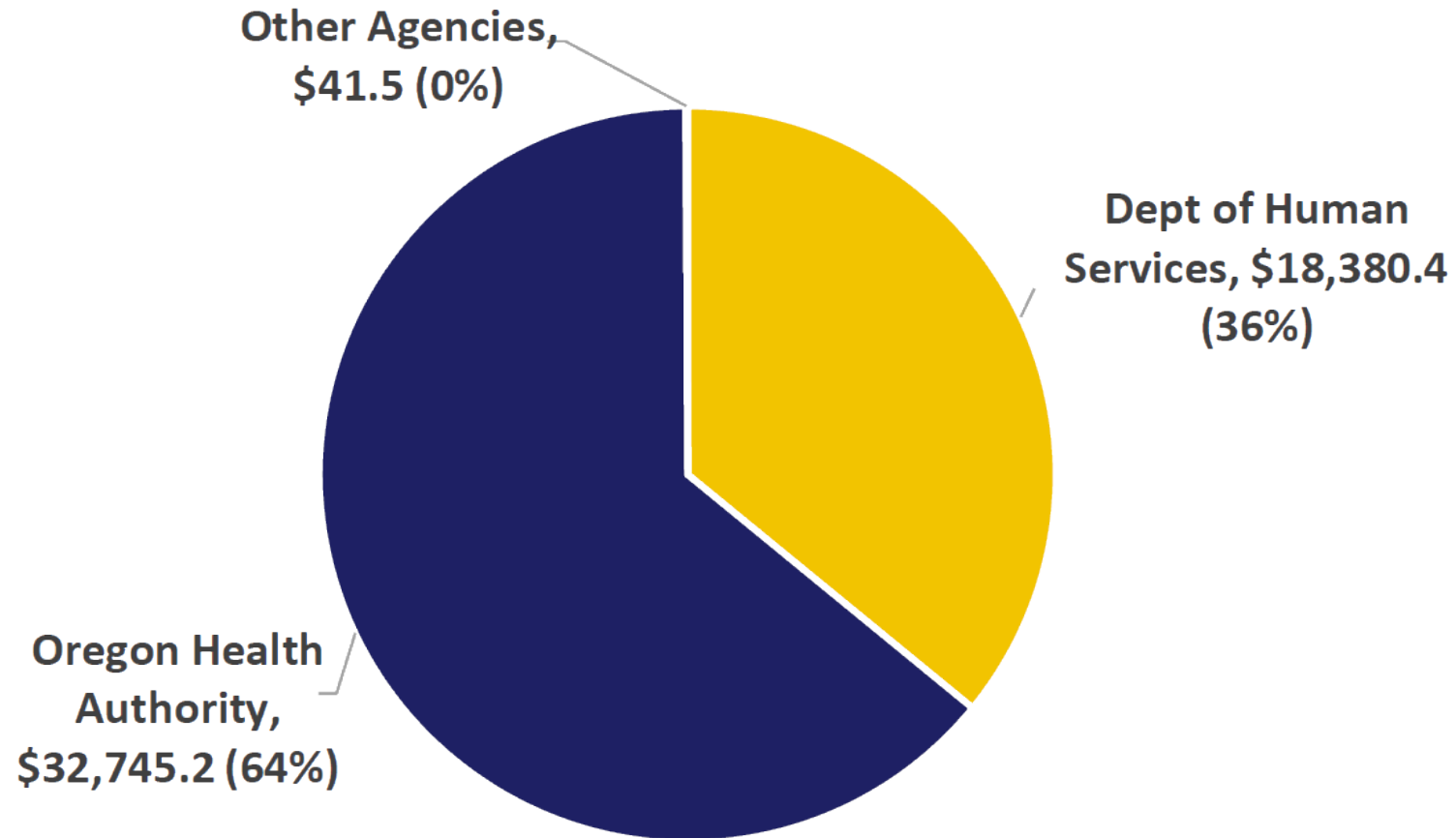
Recruit



**Oregon  
Businesses**

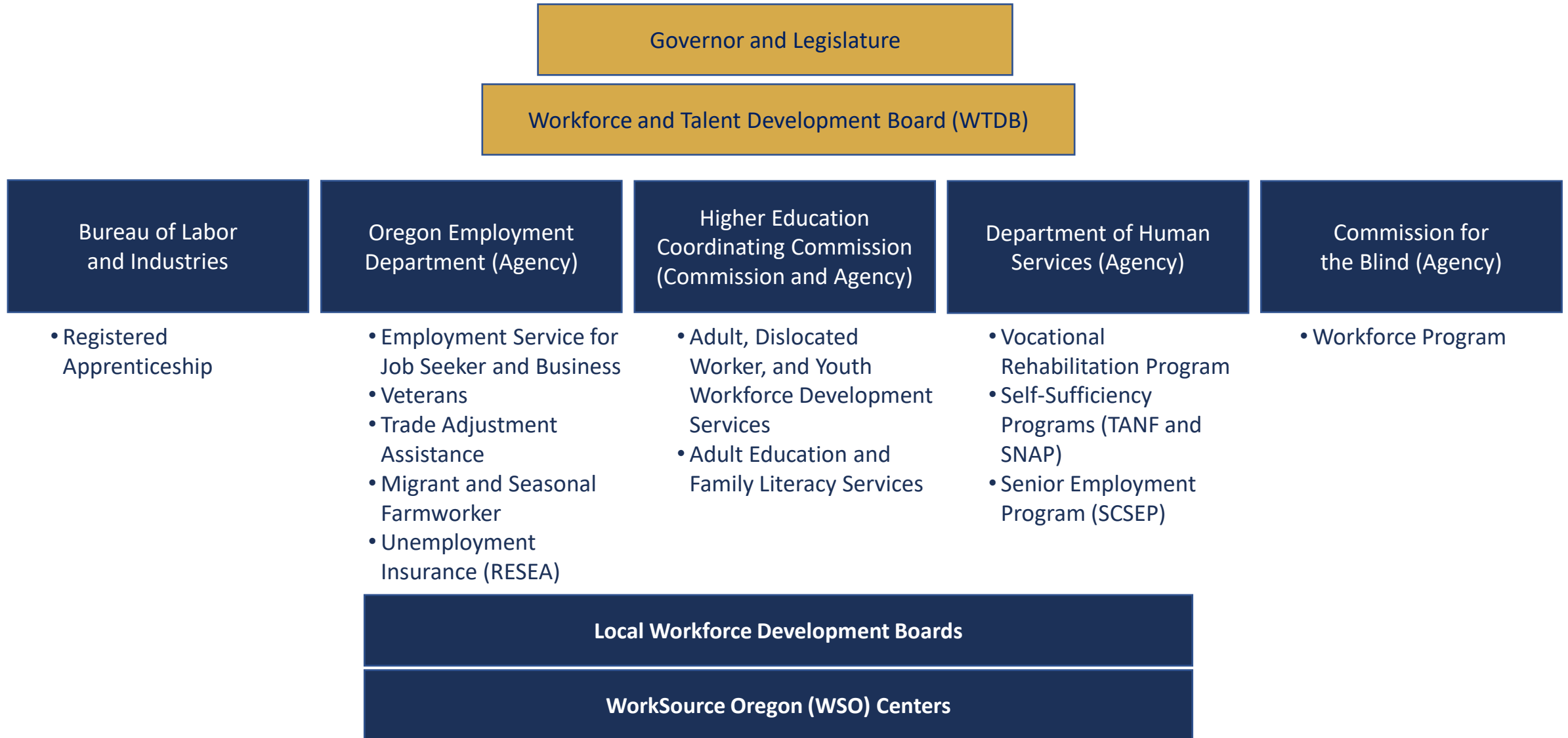
to attract and retain qualified job seekers who are blind as part of their overall hiring and diversity initiatives.

# HUMAN SERVICES SPENDING BY AGENCY AT CSL



OCB Total Funds at CSL: \$26.4 million

# OREGON'S PUBLIC WORKFORCE SYSTEM



# ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Under Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act



## For Oregonians who are blind:

- Specialized vocational rehabilitation training services to help obtain, maintain, or return to employment.



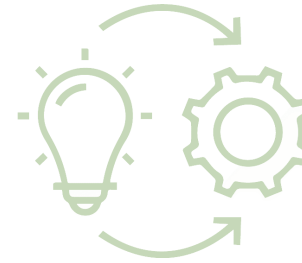
### YOUTH TRANSITION SERVICES

Coordinate transition services for youth who are blind to ensure they exit school with an individualized plan for employment.



### BUSINESS OUTREACH

Work with businesses to attract, hire, and retain qualified workers who are blind.



### IMPLEMENTATION

Help plan and implement the Workforce System at state and local level.



### PERFORMANCE MEASURES

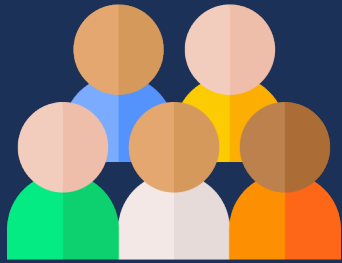
Operate within negotiated workforce performance measures.



Why our work matters:

# VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN OREGON

According to the US Census 2019 American Community Survey for Oregon



# 101,405

Oregonians experience  
visual difficulty

## Age Breakdown

0 – 17 Years: 5,825

18 – 64 Years: 48,379

65 and Older: 47,201

*The Commission for the Blind is the only agency in Oregon to provide specialized rehabilitation services for adults who experience blindness.*

## LEADING CAUSES OF BLINDNESS



### MACULAR DEGENERATION

*Leading Cause of Blindness  
for those 75 and older*

### Age Breakdown

Age-related Macular  
Degeneration affects:

50-59 Years: 2%

≥75 years: Nearly 30%

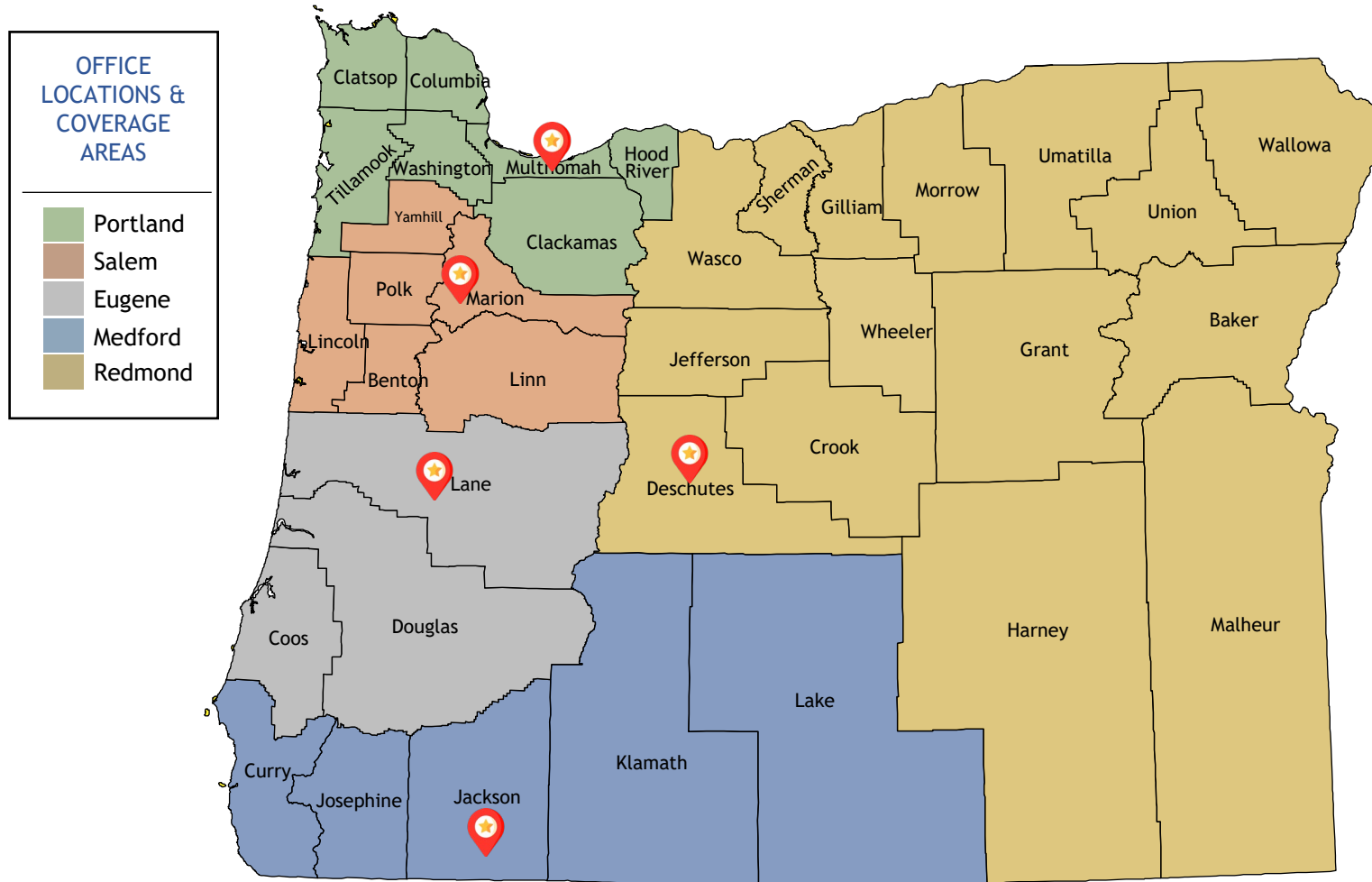


### DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Estimated 11.2% of  
Oregon adults have  
diabetes and are  
potentially at risk for  
vision loss

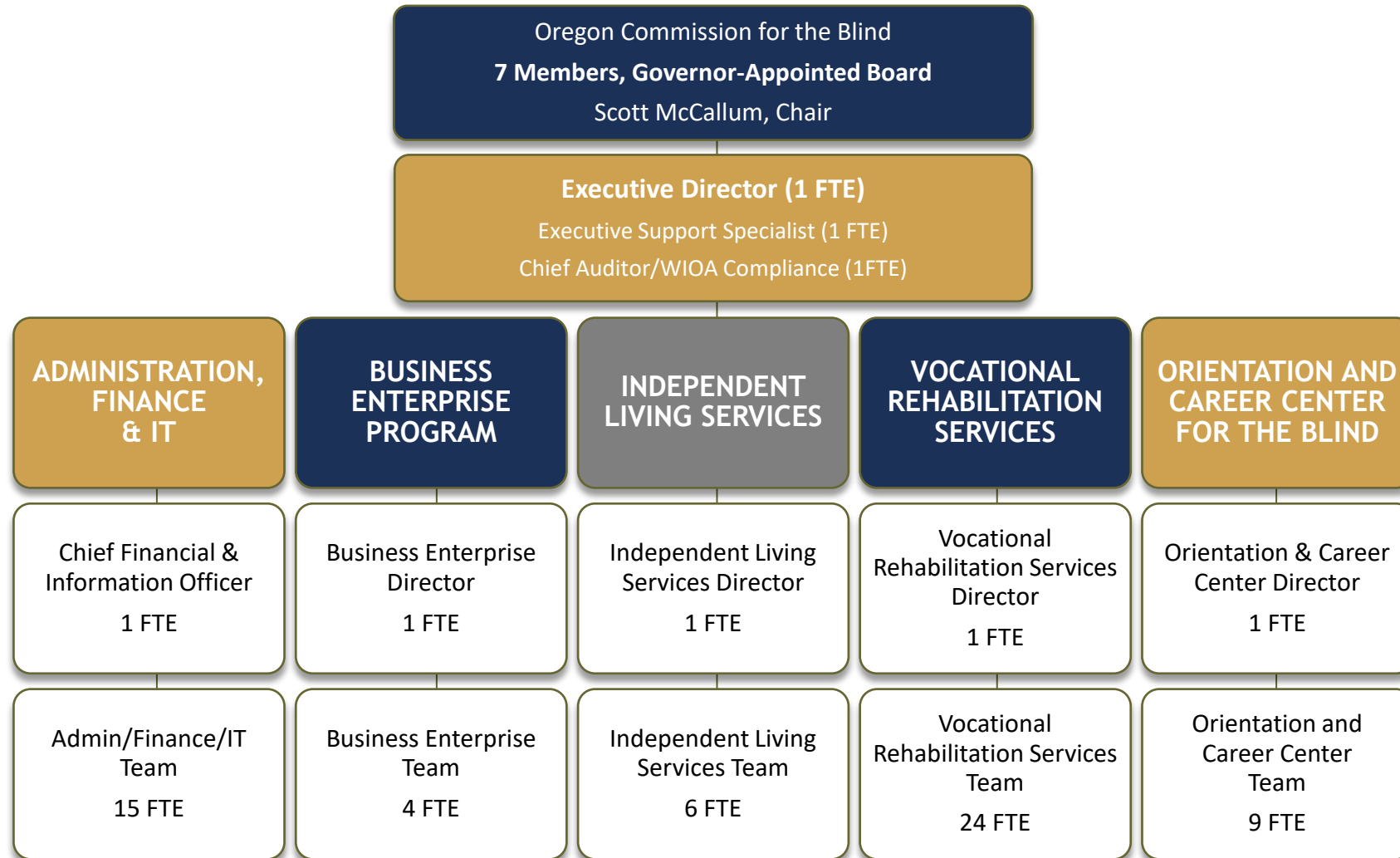
Where you can find us:

# STATEWIDE SERVICE DELIVERY



# Our team: **ORGANIZATION CHART**

2023 – 2025 GB 66.0 FTE



# Providing direct service to Oregonians in need:

## **PROGRAMS OVERVIEW**

### **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**



Assists Oregonians who are blind to develop skills of blindness and vocational training to enter the workforce and supports businesses to attract talent to diversify their workforce and retain employees who experience vision loss.

### **ORIENTATION & CAREER CENTER**



In-depth, residential Portland training center where individuals, new to vision loss, receive skills training such as adaptive technology, braille, techniques of daily living, and orientation and mobility (O&M) instruction. The focus is on skills that will prepare students for the workforce.

### **BUSINESS ENTERPRISE**



Trains, licenses and supports entrepreneurs who are legally blind to operate food service and vending businesses in public buildings and locations throughout Oregon through administration under the Federal Randolph Sheppard Act and related state statutes.

### **INDEPENDENT LIVING**



Supports seniors who experience vision loss and want to age in place. Rehabilitation Instructors provide home and community-based training such as low vision assessments, strategies to access print, techniques of daily living, phone and prescription medication accessibility.

# Providing direct service to Oregonians in need: **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**



## **PURPOSE**

Give individuals who are legally blind the tools and training needed to obtain and maintain employment.

Assist Oregon businesses to hire, retain, and promote qualified employees who are blind.

## **TARGET GROUP**

Oregonians who are legally blind and have barriers related to employment and want to work, including transition-aged youth.

## **INDIVIDUALIZED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

- Professional counseling from specialized rehabilitation counselors
- Evaluation of strengths and challenges
- Service coordination with educational and medical providers
- Adaptive skills evaluation and training
- Adaptive technology training for independent living and employment
- Job training, development, and retention
- Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for youth
- Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) early intervention for job readiness skills for youth
- Consultation with businesses for job placement and retention

## **SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM**

Services provided statewide from five regional locations:  
Portland • Salem • Eugene • Medford • Redmond

# Providing direct service to Oregonians in need: **ORIENTATION & CAREER CENTER**

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## **PURPOSE**

Provide skills of blindness training/instruction in a comprehensive, coordinated and efficient way to Vocational Rehabilitation clients as part of their plan for employment.

Maintain specialized expertise in vision rehabilitation.

## **TARGET GROUP**

Individuals who are blind have comprehensive training needs required for full independence and employment.

## **INDIVIDUALIZED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

- Adjustment to blindness
- Adaptive technology training
- Low vision assessments
- Traveling with a white cane
- Braille training
- Accessibility evaluations for business
- Job site modification, evaluation, and recommendations
- Career exploration and evaluations
- Meal preparation/shopping
- Techniques of daily living
- Woodshop instruction
- Transition workshops/services

## **SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM**

Services available in residential and commuter modalities.

# Providing direct service to Oregonians in need: **BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM**



## **PURPOSE**

Provide business management opportunities in food service and vending for Oregonians who are legally blind.

Provide customers with quality food and vending services.

## **TARGET GROUP**

Oregonians who are legally blind that are trained and licensed by the agency.

## **SERVICES PROVIDED**

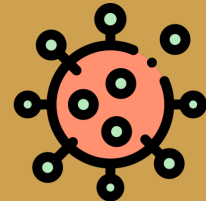
Food service and vending facilities located throughout Oregon in federal, state, and other governmental buildings.

## **LOCATION BREAKDOWN**

- 1 cafeteria
- 1 snack bar
- 1 coffee cart
- 6 vending routes
- 570+ vending sites
- 6 micro-markets

## **SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM**

- Training for new managers
- Licensing of qualified managers
- Continuing education & technical assistance for managers
- Outreach to public agencies to expand opportunities



## **COVID19**

Impact: Post-pandemic, micro markets have replaced several snack bars and cafeterias.

# Providing direct service to Oregonians in need: **INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM**

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## **PURPOSE**

Help adult Oregonians not seeking employment remain as independent as possible by providing training and teaching techniques that allow them to accomplish their tasks and fulfill their needs.

Partner with agencies with programs and equipment that allow and encourage individuals to regain or continue community activities.

Introduce resources that allow Oregonians who are experiencing vision loss to remain in their homes and vital in their communities.

## **TARGET GROUP**

Oregonians 55+ years with significant vision loss

Oregonians under the age of 55 who are deemed eligible by legal blindness (Part B)

## **SERVICES PROVIDED OR TAUGHT**

Meal preparation

Self-care and medication management

Low vision assessments

Use of lighting and magnifiers

Use of Smart devices (phones, tablets)

Cane training and safe travel

## **PARTNER AGENCIES:**

Talking Books Library

Public Utilities Commission Telecommunications Device Access Program

Department of Human Services

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs)

OHSU Casey Eye Institute

## **SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM**

Services provided statewide

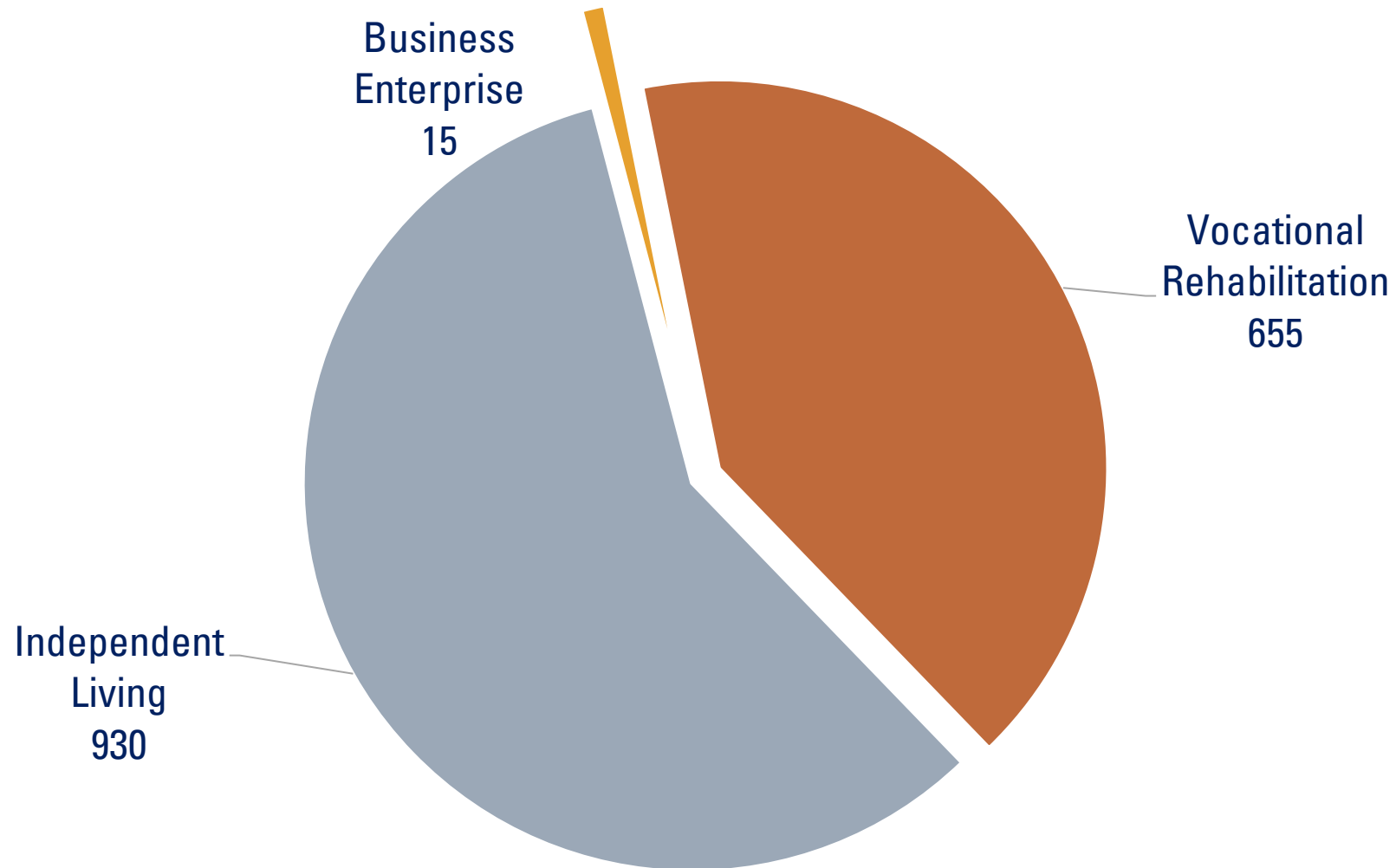
Services provided in the home environment



Our impact:

# NUMBER OF OREGONIANS SERVED – FY 2022

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Our impact:

## **OCB PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE**

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- \$22.04 - Average VR Client wage at placement in FY 2022.
- 70 - currently employed VR clients as of January 2023.
- 95% - ILOB clients who reported increased independence in 2022.
- 345 - New referrals for all programs Q4 2022.
- 16 days - Time from IL referral to application/initial appointment in 2022.
- 17.31 days - Time from VR Application to Eligibility Q4 2022 .
- 14.66 days – Time from referral to application all programs Q4 2022.
- 31.25 days - Time from VR Eligibility to Plan 2022.

## Why our work matters:

# LESSONS LEARNED/IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Pandemic magnified the challenges faced by Oregonians who experience vision loss to navigate their homes and communities and reinforced the unique role of the agency for access and inclusion.

## SERVICE DELIVERY



- The majority of individuals served by the agency are new to vision loss.
- Outreach to clients reduces isolation and increases community access, improves mental health and well being.
- Nearly all services are best-delivered in person.
- Expanded remote services alternatives to improve access.
- Many seniors are unfamiliar with digital technology and need in-person training to address lighting, glare, and other indoor conditions.

## CHALLENGES & IMPACTS



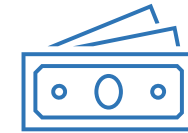
- Business Enterprise Program food service and vending facilities have been impacted by remote work and decline in building populations.
- Online, web-based forms and applications for public benefits and resources are often inaccessible or unusable by people who are blind.
- Individuals who are blind often rely on public transportation to navigate their community.
- We anticipate increased demand for agency services from individuals who delayed services due to public health concerns.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION



- Virtual access to initiate services expanded access in rural/remote communities.
- Remote job opportunities reduce transportation barriers for job seekers who are blind.
- Remote Low Vision Assessments, meal preparation, etc.
- Virtual access to Adjustment Group Counseling Program “ Living with Blindness” improved supports to citizens new to vision loss.
- Established internal lesson library to improve efficiency with instruction of standard lessons.

## BUDGET IMPLICATIONS



- Set-aside resources declined due to the reduction of net incomes in Business Enterprise Program.
- Seniors delayed home and community-based services due to health concerns .
- The great resignation resulted in higher than usual turnover of agency staff.
- Business Enterprise Program Vending Machine Project was delayed due to closure of public buildings/vending machine locations.

# AGENCY BUDGET 21-23

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## Budget Changes that Affect Agency Operations through 6/30/23

Blind and Visually  
Impaired Student (BVIS)  
SWEP funding is no  
longer available.

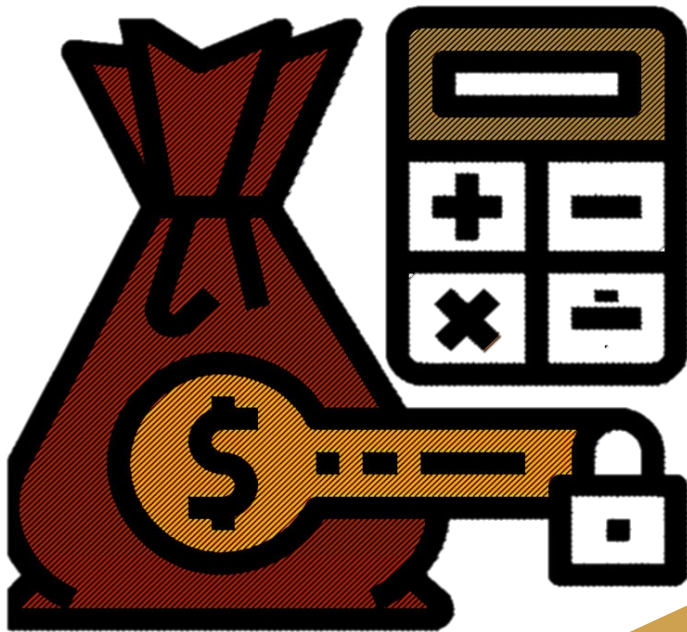
Case Management System  
maintenance and support  
expenditures need to be  
budgeted.

Vending machine project for  
Business Enterprise Program  
was delayed from 19-21  
due to COVID-19 and  
public building closures.

Outdated server equipment  
and security risks expedited  
the need to move data server  
hosting to DAS.

Stretching our resources:

# COST CONTAINMENT MEASURES



Utilization of information and referral and comparable benefits available in the community to meet client needs where available.

Utilize the Department of Administrative Services Chief Human Resources Office HR/Consultation for agency workforce management.

Maximize the utilization of internal staff resources to serve clients prior to contracting out where feasible without compromising quality or timely service delivery.

Reduced in-person meetings whenever possible in order to prioritize travel to serve Oregonians who are blind.

Effective Oct. 1, 2022:  
Initiated case management files moving to a paperless electronic format.  
Projected completion date:  
September 30, 2023.

# Rising to meet the needs of our ever-changing world: **CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES**



Economic and public policy challenges such as behavioral health shortages facing Oregon disproportionately affect individuals who experience disability.



National shortage of professionals in specialized disciplines in the field of blindness rehabilitation, particularly Orientation and Mobility instructors who are certified to teach cane travel.



Aging citizens with vision loss who desire to age in place require training and support that allow them to remain independent in their homes and engaged in their communities.



Available adaptive solutions for individuals who are blind require training and support to ensure access and utilization of technology solutions in order to remain independent.

Strengthening our future:

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

## SERVICE EQUITY



- Statewide access for all Oregonians.
- Inclusive service delivery and equitable access to services.
- Increased visibility so all Oregonians know who we are and the services we provide.

## ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY



- Expand access to agency programs and services.
- Support Oregon State Government and private businesses in DEI efforts.
- Modernize opportunities for entrepreneurs who are blind.

## AGING OREGONIANS



- In the Community:
- With training and support, seniors who experience vision loss may live safely and independently.
- On the Job:
- Supporting skilled workers who experience vision loss and helping businesses retain talent.

## ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT



- Performance Optimization.
- Information Technology and security.
- Stakeholder engagement and community partnerships to improve outcomes.
- Accessibility and usability of statewide systems.

## SPECIALIZED STAFF



- Recruit highly skilled rehabilitation professionals.
- Develop existing staff through continuing education.
- Retain staff by offering competitive compensation and advancement opportunities.

# Agency Request Budget Context: **MISSION FOCUSED/STABLE INVESTMENTS**

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Funding of .50 FTE Counselor with donated funds which are not sustainable/replenished.

Funding of .50 FTE Business Enterprise Specialist is budgeted out of depleted set-aside fund.

Indirect cost rate positions (accounting, admin, etc.) are budgeted with Federal Funds which is not allowable.



Rehabilitation Instructors are not budgeted based on program needs.

New emerging issue that will impact 23-25: BVIS Funds not available.

DAS/CHRO partnership on strategies to recruit/retain very specialized workforce within a national shortage.



Strengthening our fiscal future:

# AGENCY BUDGET PRIORITIES

Align budget categories to meet the needs of agency operations.

Expand and modernize existing opportunities in the Business Enterprise Program.

Expand access to agency programs and services statewide so any Oregonian in need of our services can benefit.

Leverage all federal dollars through stable sources of match.

Maintain safety net of critical services for Oregonians who are blind.

Modernize IT infrastructure to meet strategic and operational priorities for data integrity, information security, and business continuity.



# 2023-25 GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Retains the current level of staffing in programs and includes partial funding for:

POP 103

POP 104

## AGENCY REQUESTED POP 101 EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY AND ACCESS- NOT INCLUDED IN GOVERNORS BUDGET

Outreach to unserved/underserved communities, expanding accessibility of statewide systems and adaptive devices for seniors.

## AGENCY REQUESTED POP 102 BE PROGRAM ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE- NOT INCLUDED IN GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

Funds modernization efforts and an existing .50 FTE with general fund to address the impact of COVID-19 on the program and available funds.

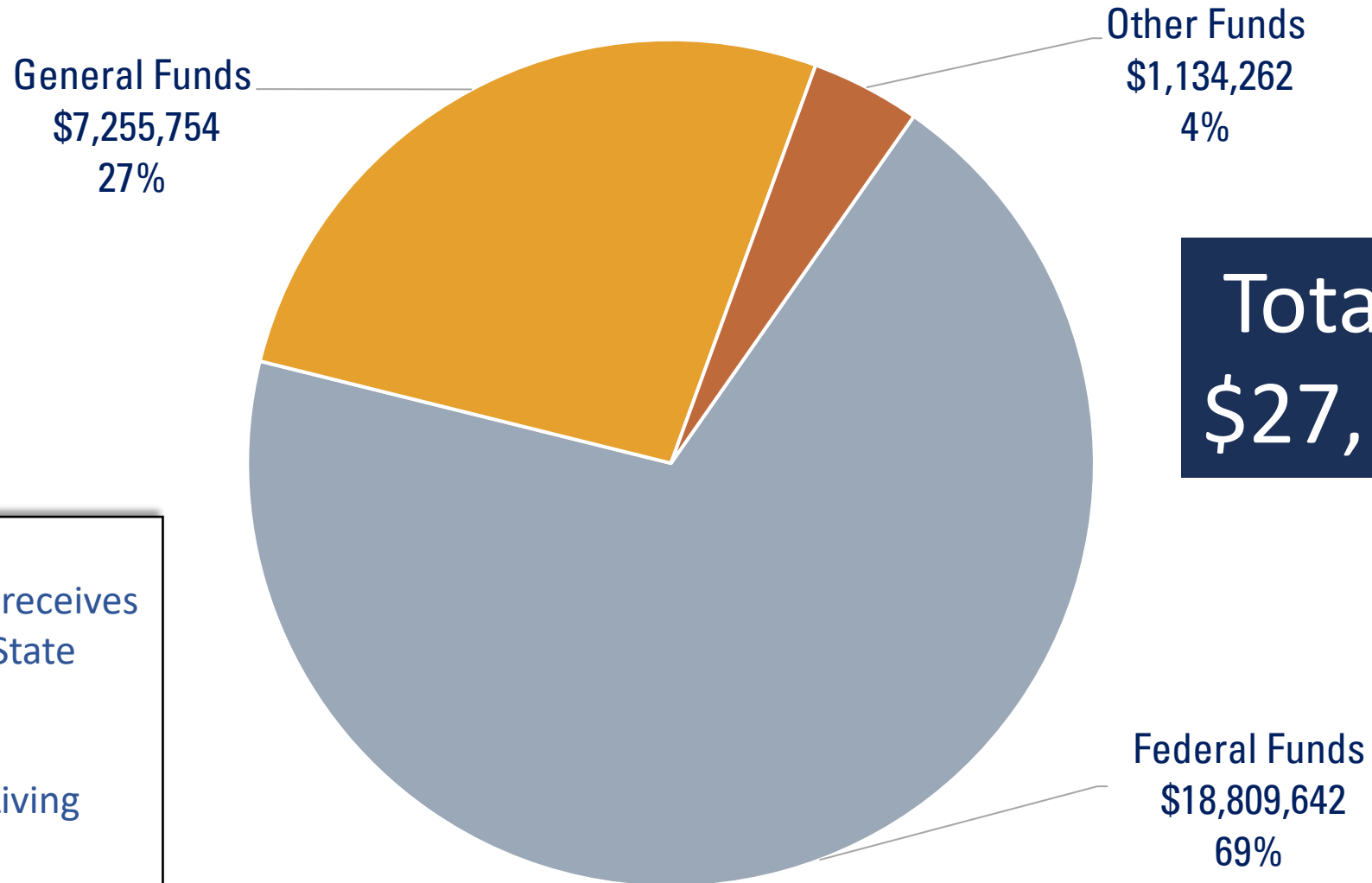
## AGENCY REQUESTED POP 103 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION

Investments in data integrity and security, maintenance and support of the case management system, employee IT support and Workday.

## AGENCY REQUESTED POP 104 SPECIALIZED STAFF

Recruitment and retention of specialized staff and professional development in their fields of discipline, creates parity in positions and advancement opportunities

# 2023-25 GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET

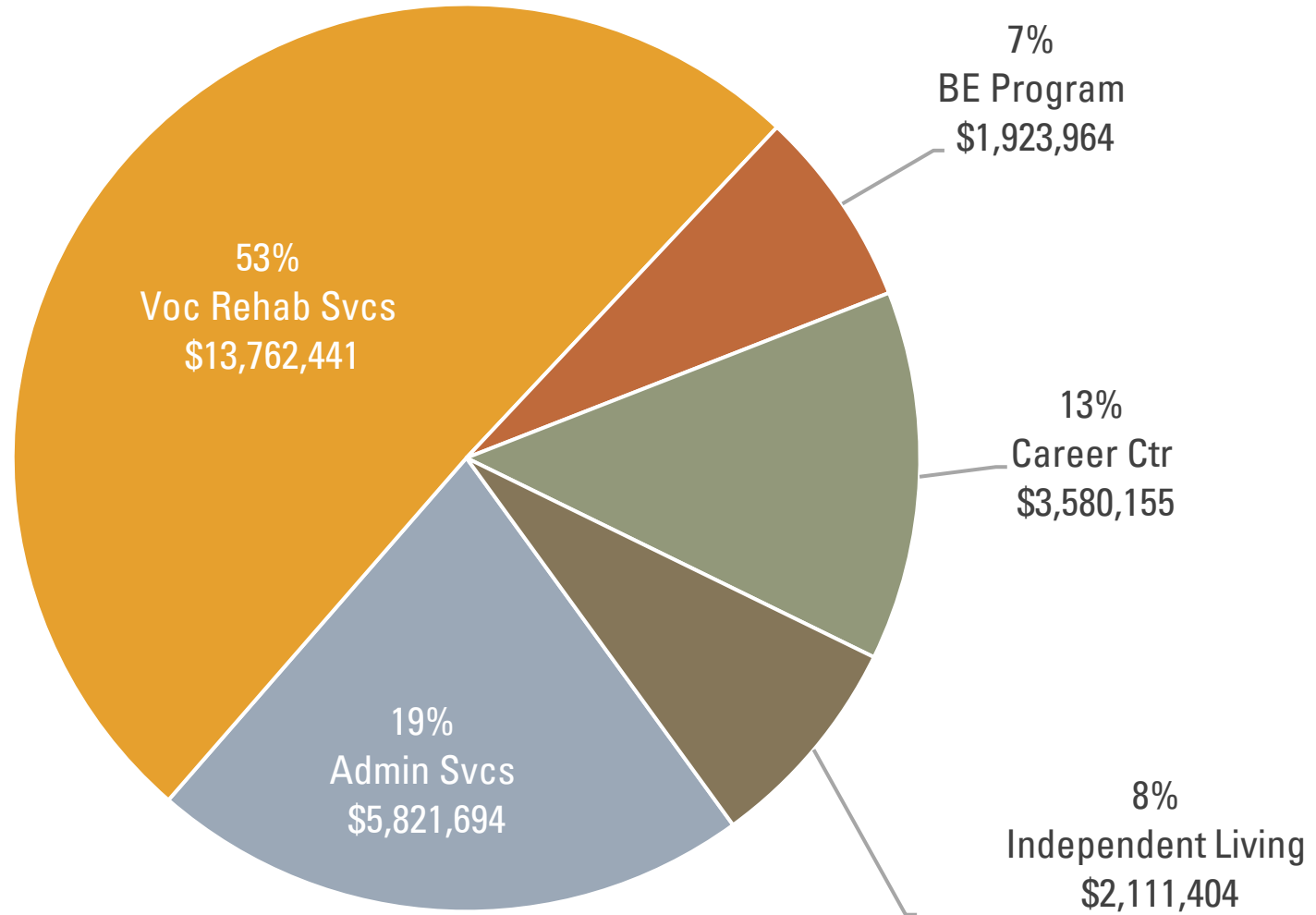


Vocational  
Rehabilitation receives  
a **4:1** Federal/State  
Match

Independent Living  
receives a **9:1**  
Federal/State Match

# 2023-25 GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Total Funds  
by program  
\$27,199,658



How we're doing:

## OVERVIEW- AGENCY KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES (KPM)

### KPM #1 EMPLOYMENT:

New Target Established 2022: 51  
2021 – 60.5; 2022 – 60.4

Percentage of Vocational Rehabilitation participants who are employed in unsubsidized, competitive, integrated settings the second quarter after exiting the program.

### KPM #2 INDEPENDENT LIVING:

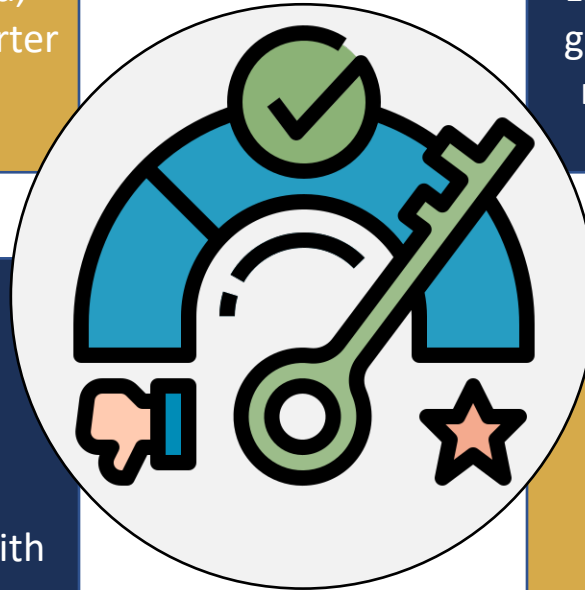
FFY Performance for Total Closed  
2021 – 98% 2022 – 86.4%

Percentage of eligible individuals closed successfully and unsuccessfully in the Older Blind Independent Living Program who reported feeling that they are in greater control and more confident in their ability to maintain their current living situation as a result of services received.

### KPM #3 CUSTOMER SERVICE:

FFY Performance for Overall  
2021 – 94%; 2022 – 90.5%

Percent of customers rating their satisfaction with the agency's customer service as "good" or "excellent": overall, timeliness, accuracy, helpfulness, expertise, availability of information.



### KPM #4 BEST PRACTICES:

FFY Performance  
2021 – 100%; 2022 – 100%

Percent of total best practices met by the Commission.

How our services help Oregon's economy:

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES ARE A GOOD INVESTMENT



**Successfully Employed  
Clients Pay State and  
Federal Taxes  
throughout Their  
Working Life!**

**Overall savings up to 10x the cost of rehabilitation!**

**78.7%**

**FEDERAL FUNDS**

**Services Reduce Dependence  
on Public Assistance**

Successfully employed clients  
are less likely to be dependent  
on public assistance programs.

Average savings over a lifetime per  
individual Social Security recipient  
(Supplemental Security Income or  
SSI) who goes off benefits:

**FEMALES**

**\$527,561**

**MALES**

**\$472,721**

**21.3%**

**GENERAL/OTHER FUNDS**

**On Average:**  
Oregon's contribution is paid  
back in state taxes  
in approximately **17 months.**

Average savings to the Oregon  
Health Plan over a lifetime per  
individual who goes off benefits:

**FEMALES**

**\$282,984**

**MALES**

**\$257,188**

# How our services help Oregon's economy: **OLDER BLIND SERVICES ARE A GOOD INVESTMENT**

*For every individual we help to live independently  
there is a significant cost savings!*



Each year the State of Oregon saves a minimum of:

**\$29,502**



Per individual receiving older blind services in lieu of moving into assisted living.

**\$32,088**



Per individual in lieu of foster home care.

**\$160,899**



Per individual in lieu of intermediate nursing home care.

*77% of Oregon residents  $\geq 55$  experiencing vision loss live independently.*

In FFY 2022, of 930 older blind served, 731 were still living in their own homes.



# Thank you

## Questions/Follow up:

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