



Oregon Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology & Audiology

Established in 1973

2025-27 Governor's Budget

Report to the Legislature, February 2025

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Link to Governor Kotek's full Budget Book is here: https://www.oregon.gov/das/financial/documents/2023-25_gb.pdf

Pictured: South Santiam River near Lebanon, Oregon, Photo by Gary Halvorson

The Board's Mission and Makeup

- The Board of Examiners was established in 1973 to license and regulate the performance of speech-language pathologists and audiologists for consumer protection.
- Board is comprised of two public members, two audiologists, two speech-language therapists (SLP), one otolaryngologist (ENT physician) and one speech-language pathology assistant (SLPA). The Board and Executive Director serve at the pleasure of the Governor.
- The Board is more diversified than the state as a whole and includes representation from both urban and rural areas of Oregon.
- Three full time staff (director, Investigator, administrative assistant)

STATUTORY AUTHORITY AND RULES

The Board of Examiners was established in 1973 under ORS 676 – Health Professions Generally, and ORS 681 Hearing and Speech Professionals

681.220 Policy. It is declared to be a policy of this state that it is necessary to provide regulatory authority over persons offering speech-language pathology and audiology services to the public in order to:

- (1) Safeguard the public health, safety and welfare;
- (2) Protect the public from being misled by incompetent, unscrupulous and unauthorized persons
- (3) Protect the public from unprofessional conduct by qualified speech-language pathologists and audiologists; and
- (4) Help ensure the availability of the highest possible quality speech-language pathology and audiology services to people of this state who have communication disabilities. [Formerly 694.315; 1989 c.224 §134; 1995 c.280 §2; 2005 c.698 §2; 2007 c.70 §307]

The authority and responsibilities of the Board are contained in (ORS) 681.205 through 681.605, ORS 676.108 through 681.560, and in Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) 335-001-0000 through 335-095-0065.

Regulation of Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology

- **Audiologists** - about 400 licensees. Audiologists must hold a doctorate that included a successful fellowship and must also pass the PRAXIS exam.
- Audiologists apply the principles, methods and procedures of measurement, prediction, evaluation, testing, counseling, consultation and instruction that relate to the development and disorders of hearing, vestibular functions including tinnitus, and related language and speech disorders to prevent or modify the disorders or to assist individuals in auditory and related skills for communication. They also fit and sell hearing aids.
- Audiologists work in schools, hospitals, clinics and other settings.

Regulation of Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology

- **Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs)** – approximately 3,500 licensees. Requires Master's Degree plus successful completion of 9-month clinical fellowship and passing PRAXIS exam score. A conditional license is required during the fellowship. In 2024, 56% of all new licensees were out-of-state.
- SLPs apply the principles, methods and procedures of measurement, prediction, evaluation, testing, counseling, consultation and instruction that relate to the development and disorders of speech, voice, swallowing and related language and hearing disorders to prevent or modify the disorders or to assist individuals in cognition-language and communication skills.
- SLPs work with Oregonians of all ages in clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and other settings.

Regulation of Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology

- **Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs)** – approximately 350 licensees. Requires either a Bachelor's Degree in communication disorders, or an associate's degree in speech-language pathology assisting. Applicants must have completed 100 hours of fieldwork supervised by a licensed SLP.
- SLPAs may not have a caseload and must work under the supervision of their supervising SLP to provide services for that SLP's caseload. They may not conduct evaluations, write or change plans of care, and have other restrictions. They provide therapy as directed by the SLP, who is responsible for the services they provide to Oregonians.
- SLPAs work with Oregonians of all ages in both educational and healthcare settings.

Current 2023-25 Biennium Financial Status

- Revenue for the current biennium already exceeds LAB and we project ending this biennium with at least \$500,000 more in revenue than what was budgeted, mostly due to the massive influx of out-of-state licensees serving Oregonians via telepractice.
- We project an ending fund balance at 6/30/25 of \$750,000 which provides a 13-month contingency. (Licensing renewals are every other year and the Board must have adequate cashflow for the entire biennium).

Major Budget Drivers

- Steady upward trend in number of licensees continues. The percentage increase in the number of licensees has averaged 13% per biennium since 2015. In 2015 there were 2,100 licensees, and as of the end of January 2025, there are more than 4,000 licenses.
- Board caseload averages increasing substantially and becoming more complex, particularly due to the massive spike in telepractice, misuse of SLPAs, illegal deployment of educational assistants who are not qualified nor licensed to provide speech and language services to Oregon's children, and Medicaid fraud. Annual caseloads are from 50 to 100 and the board has one full time investigator.
- Increasing numbers of out of state providers obtaining license so they can provide telepractice services to Oregonians from their home states. This trend existed before the pandemic and continues. With no barriers from the Board to licensing, 56% of all new licensees approved in every year since 2020 live outside of Oregon. In January 2025 alone, only 25% of new licensees are Oregonians.
- Increases in DOJ costs.

Governor's 2025-27 Budget

- Other Funds \$1,316,857
- Stable program, continuing with 3 FTE despite significant annual increases in the number of licenses and cases. The Board is still able to provide excellent customer service and if all documents have been received, the Board issues licenses within one business day.
- Fees were raised in 2021 after not having been raised since 2013. We do not anticipate the need for a fee increase in 2025-27.
- Governor's Budget provides an adequate level of reserves to ensure required cash flow at the end of the biennium. The bulk of revenue comes in at the beginning of the biennium via biennial renewals.
- Should the Board be required to make a 10% reduction there would be an across the staff reduction in time to reach the required amount.
- The investigator position was vacant for several months in 2024 with work covered by the Executive Director. As of January 27, 2025, the position is filled, and we expect to have no vacancies during the 25-27 biennium.

Key Performance Measures - Proposed

The Board is asking that the Key Performance Measure related to SLPAs be eliminated and two new SLPA measures adopted (see next slide).

Despite publishing a guide for speech-language pathologists who utilize SLPAs to assist with their students/patients, and an SLPA self audit guide, the Board continues to see misuse of SLPAs in both educational and private practice settings. The Board has also exposed Medicaid fraud when SLPAs were deployed in opposition to Oregon statutes and rules.

Key Performance Measures - Proposed

Current KPM #1:

SLPA Supervision - Percentage of School District Compliance with SLPA supervision requirements outlined in OAR 335-095-0050 (Goal 60%)

We propose to delete this and make the customer service KPM that is currently number 2, into the new number one with no changes. Note that the Governor is requiring all agencies to adopt a customer service policy by March 31, 2025, so this KPM will be reviewed for possible revision at the 2027 session.

New #1: Customer Service - Percentage of customers rating their satisfaction with the agency's customer service as "good"; or "excellent": overall, timeliness, accuracy, helpfulness, expertise, availability of information (Goal 95%)

Key Performance Measures - Proposed

SLPA Audits: Proposed new #2 and #3 to replace the deleted #1:

#2. Percentage of individual speech-language pathology assistants (SLPAs) and their supervising speech-language pathologists (SLPs) that passed the (SLPA) audit (90%).

#3. Percentage of School District and Education Service Districts that passed the speech-language pathology assistant (SLPA) audit (90%).

Key Performance Measures

The remaining three are reaching target goals, and will remain:

#4. Timely Resolution of Complaints - Percent of investigations presented to the Board within 180 days from the date of the complaint (Goal 90%)

#5. Best Practices - Percent of total best practices met by the Board (Goal 100%)