



Presentation to the 2025 Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services

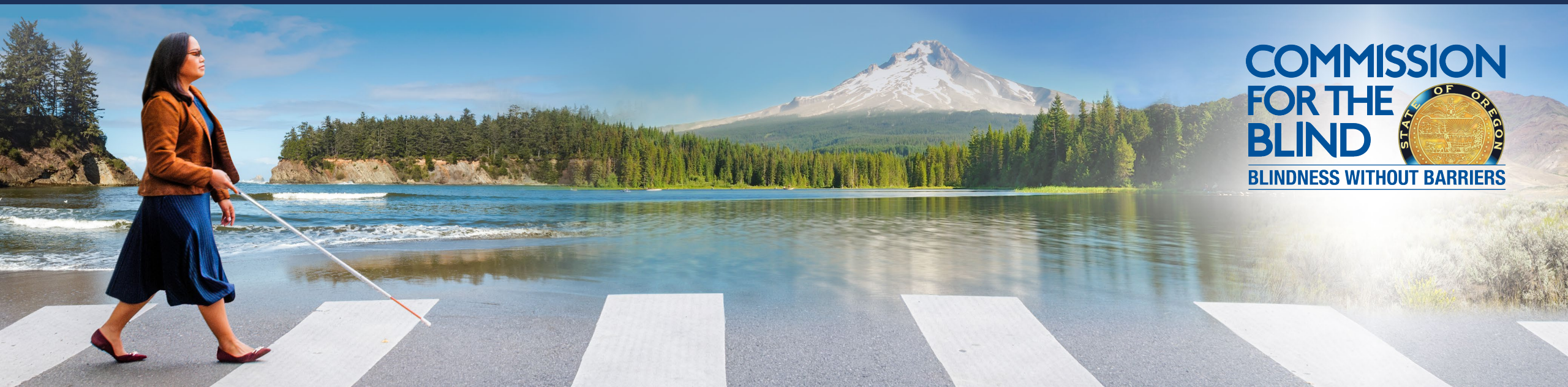
Oregon Commission for the Blind

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Executive Director

February 26, 2025

OUR MISSION

EMPOWER OREGONIANS WHO ARE BLIND TO FULLY ENGAGE IN LIFE



**COMMISSION
FOR THE
BLIND**



BLINDNESS WITHOUT BARRIERS

Our foundation:

AGENCY PRINCIPLES

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

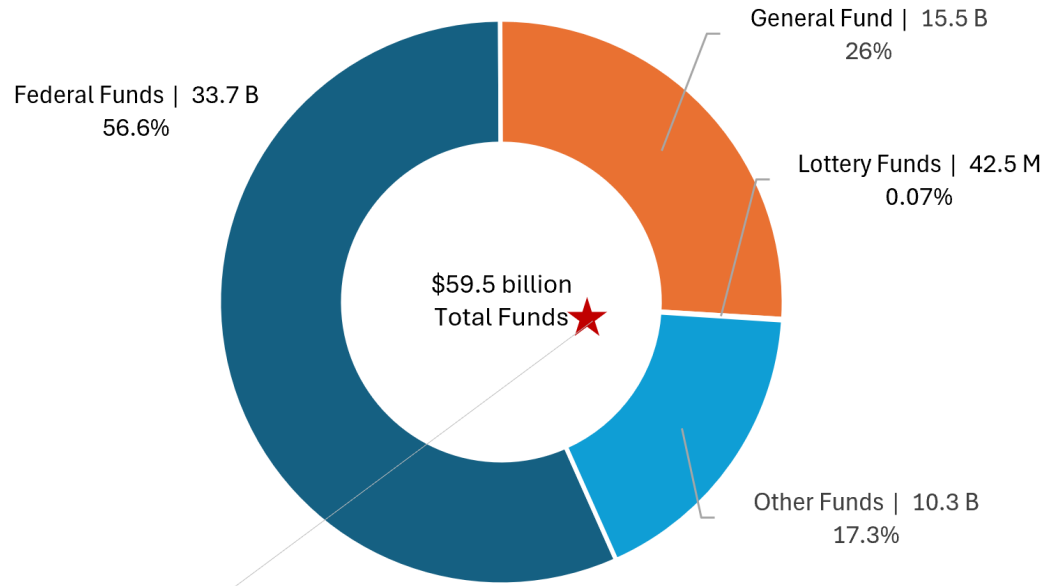
VALUES



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

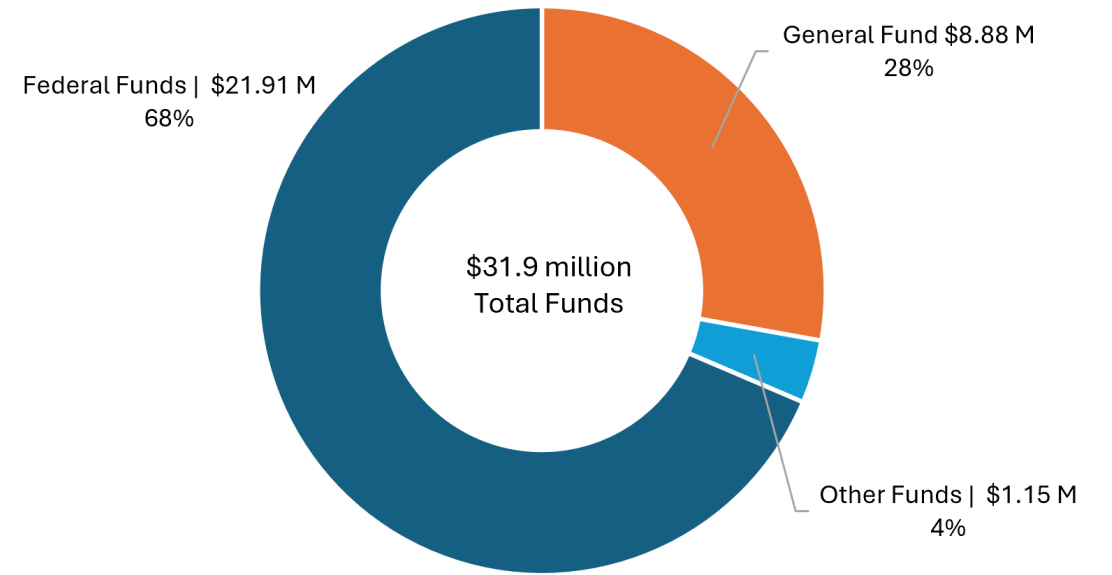
HUMAN SERVICES SPENDING BY AGENCY AT CSL

2025-27 CSL by Fund Type



★ OCB represents 0.05% of Human Services' Total Funds at CSL.

2025-27 CSL by Fund Type



OCB Total Funds at CSL

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 Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP).
Commission restructured to be consumer driven.

1973

Oregon School for the Blind was closed, making the agency the only statewide agency focusing on blindness education and training.

2009

Implemented new case management system for federal tracking and data reporting - converted to paperless client case files

2021

1937

Established Commission for the Blind with statewide responsibilities.

1957

Portland headquarters built using donated resources through the Oregon Community Foundation.

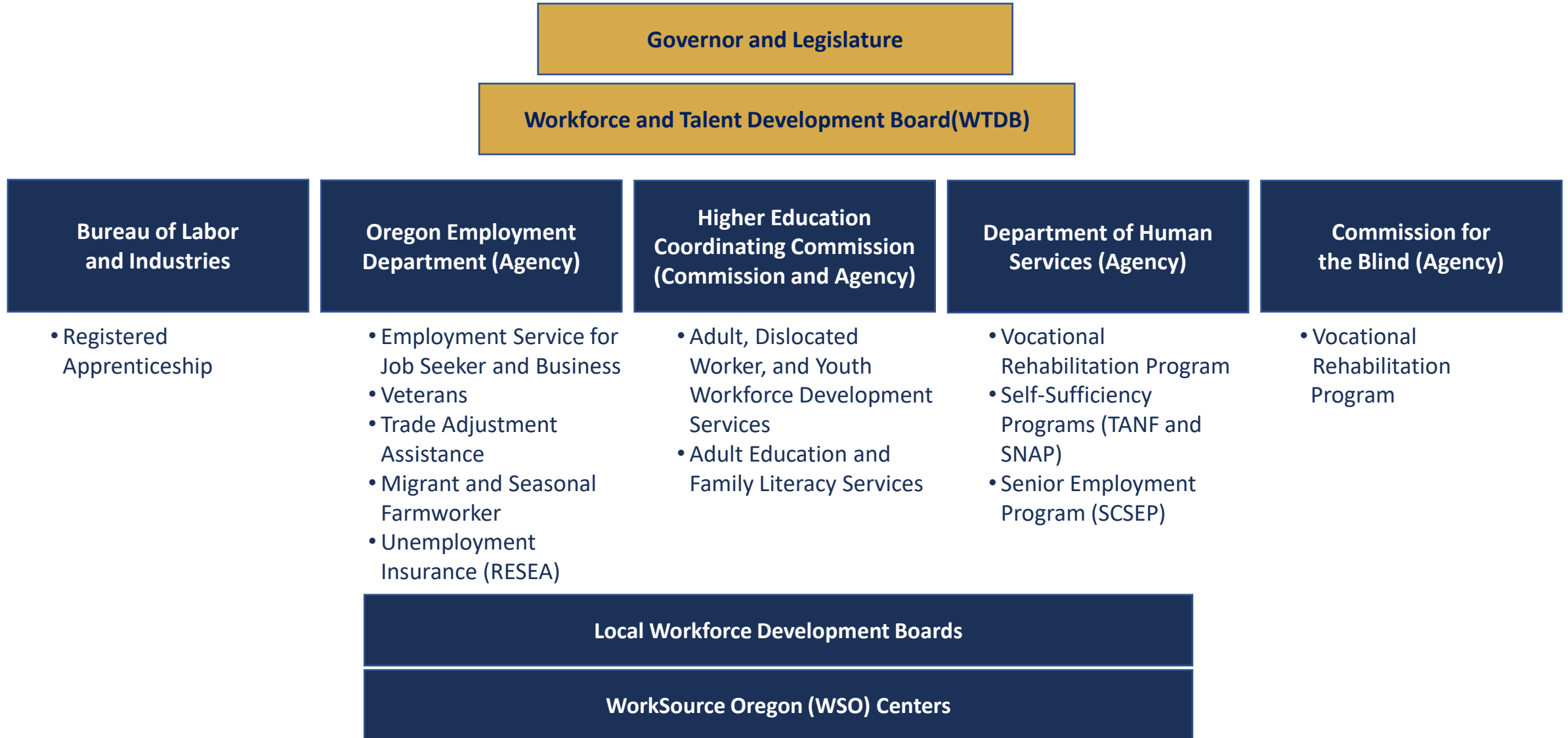
1985

Expanded SWEP to incorporate Supported Employment model with workplace supports.

2015

Expanded service delivery capacity by adding three new teachers to serve more seniors to remain safe and independent

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.

Staying on mission:

KEY SERVICE OBJECTIVES

Help



**Oregonians
who are
blind**

get and keep jobs and prepare for careers that allow them to be part of the workforce and 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 train and 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 recruitment and initiatives.

Why our work matters:

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN OREGON

According to the US Census 2023 American Community Survey for Oregon



101,069

Oregonians experience
visual difficulty

Age Breakdown

0 – 17 Years: 7,989

18 – 64 Years: 49,146

65 and Older: 43,934

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

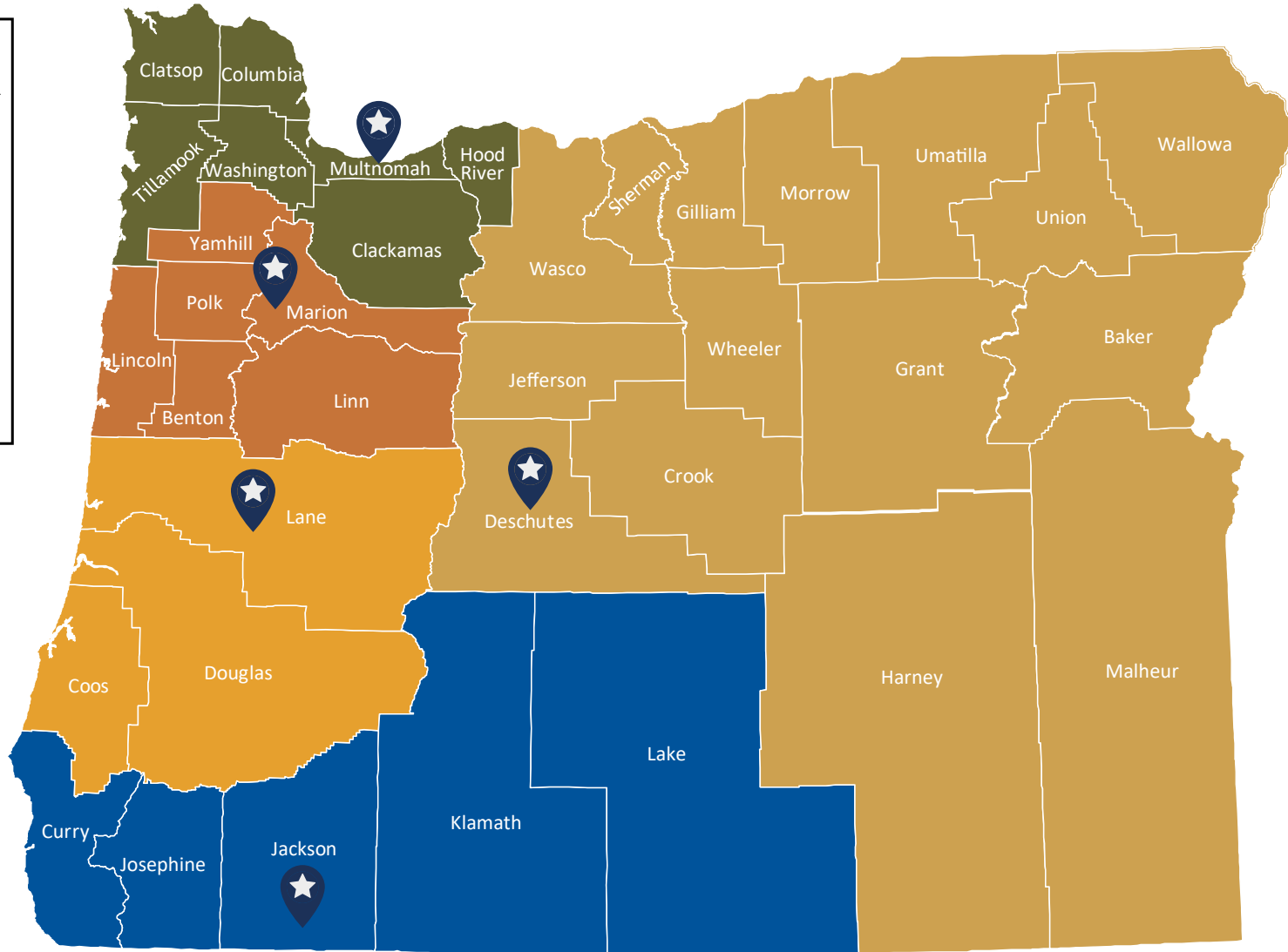
An estimated 9.5% of
Oregon's population have
diabetes and are
potentially at risk for
medical complications
leading to vision loss.

Where you can find us:

STATEWIDE SERVICE DELIVERY

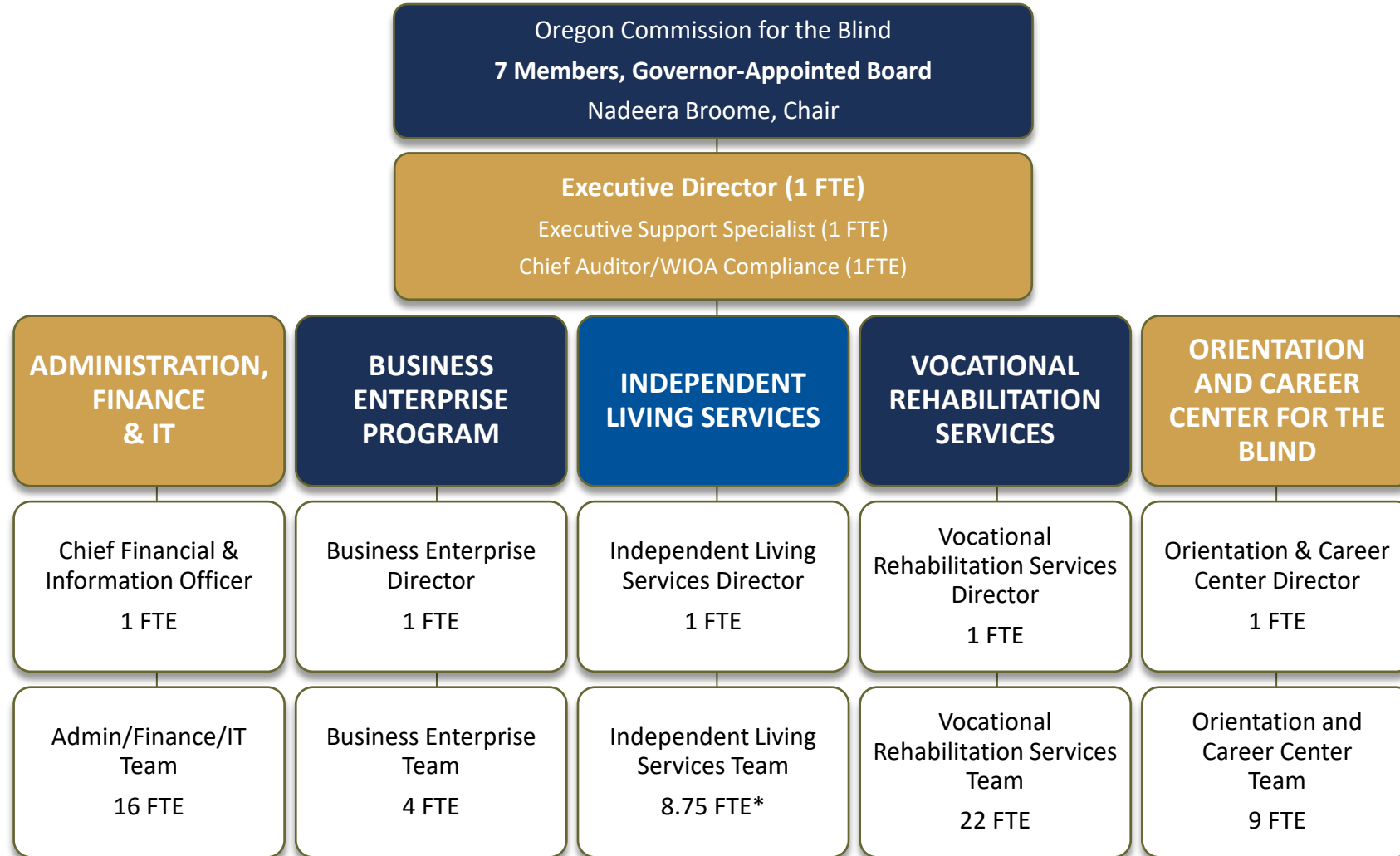
OFFICE LOCATIONS & COVERAGE AREAS

- Portland
- Salem
- Eugene
- Medford
- Redmond



Our team: **ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**

2025 – 27 GRB 67.75 FTE (68 Positions)



*Governor's Budget includes .75 FTE

Providing direct service to Oregonians in need: **PROGRAMS OVERVIEW**

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION



Assists Oregonians who are blind to develop skills of blindness, vocational training and education to enter the workforce and maintain employment; supports businesses in Oregon with their workforce talent needs and help 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 to re-enter/prepare for the workforce.

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE



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

INDEPENDENT LIVING



Supports seniors with vision loss to live independently. Specialized 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**



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 Cafe
- 1 Snack Bar
- 8 Vending Routes
- 470+ Vending Sites
- 4 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.

Business Models have shifted to adjust for changes in building populations and customer needs to maintain profitability and viability.

Program is expanding to food carts that are adaptable/mobile.

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



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

Oregon Talking Books Library

Oregon Public Utilities Commission Telecommunications Device Access Program (TDAP)

Oregon Department of Human Services

Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs)

OHSU Casey Eye Institute

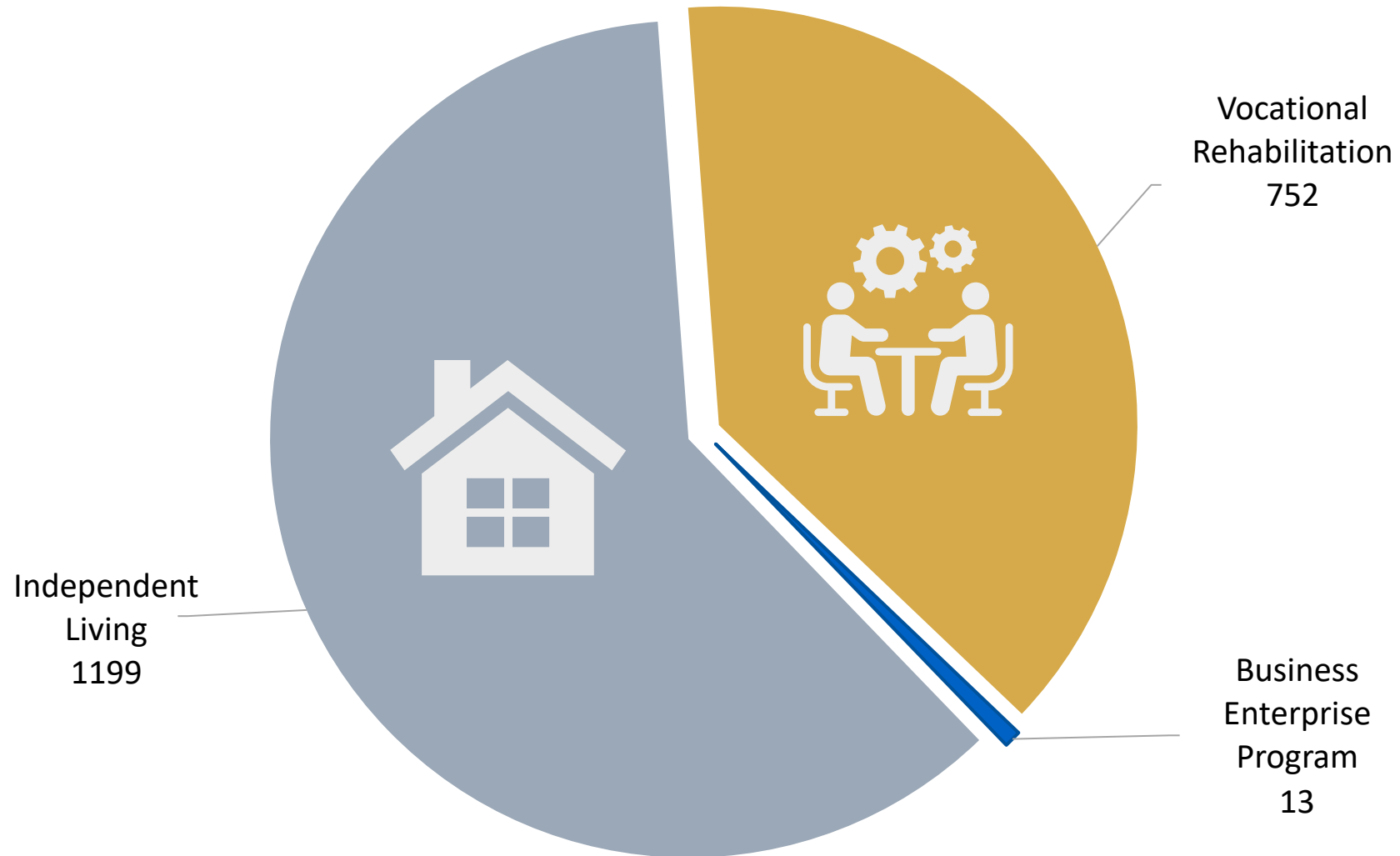
SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM

Services provided statewide

Services provided in the home environment

Our impact:

1,964 OREGONIANS SERVED – FFY 2024



Stretching our resources:

COST CONTAINMENT MEASURES



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

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; prioritize travel to serve Oregonians who are blind.

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

Implemented program/client case files moving to a paperless electronic format.

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



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.



Artificial Intelligence (AI) may create new tools for independence. Adaptive solutions for individuals who are blind require training and support to ensure access and utilization of technology solutions.



Growing population of aging citizens with vision loss and increased demand for training and support that allow them to remain safe and independent in their homes and engaged in their communities.



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

Strengthening our future:

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Workforce Participation



Increase the workforce participation rate and job retention for Oregonians who experience vision loss.

Business and Community



Agency partnerships strengthen and improve access and opportunities for Oregonians who experience vision loss.

Aging in Oregon



Improve access and timeliness of independent living services throughout Oregon for seniors to remain safe and independent.

Customer Service



Agency business processes, resources and infrastructure are responsive to the needs of our customers-internal and external.

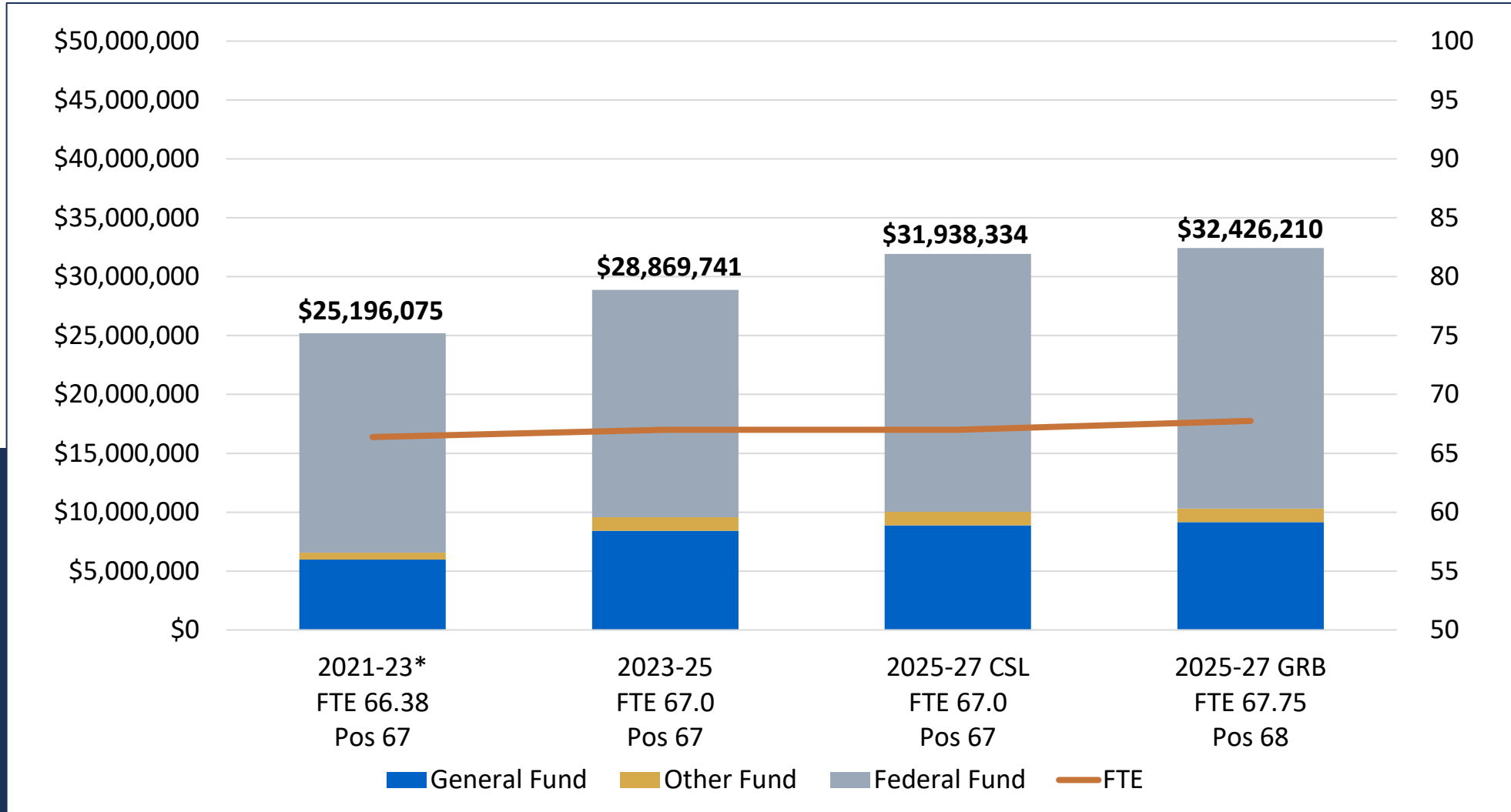
Succession Planning



Recruit and retain specialized staff who deliver exemplary services to Oregonians.

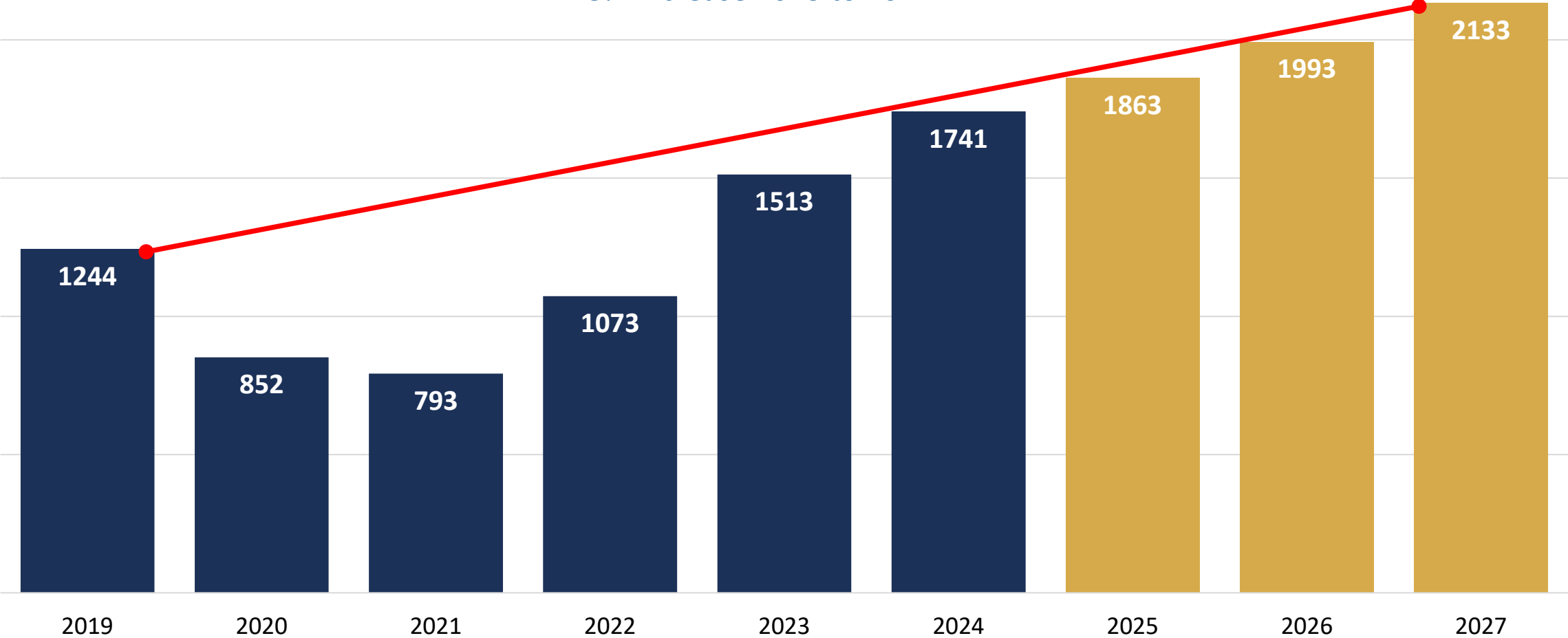
Agency Budget Context:

AGENCY BUDGET AT A GLANCE



Agency Budget Context: REFERRALS AT A GLANCE – ALL PROGRAMS

- 41% Increase 2019 thru 2024.
- 15% Increase 2023 to 2024.



Agency Budget Context:

2025-27 BUDGET DRIVERS AND RISKS

Case service costs including technology and job training and supports will likely extend beyond available resources.



Recruitment and retention challenges for highly specialized positions related to blindness rehabilitation/skills training.



Job stabilization services are being required to support clients navigating rapid changes in work environments.



Agency resources and staffing levels are not able to meet the needs of Oregon's population with vision loss.

Limited capacity and resources to fully implement technology interfaces to conduct state business (i.e.; Workday, Oregon Buys).

Actions at the federal level could cause delays, disruption or uncertainty of funding that could impact services.

2025-27 GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

Governor's Budget

\$9,161,859	GF
\$1,147,421	OF
<u>\$22,116,930</u>	FF
\$32,426,210	TF
67.75	FTE

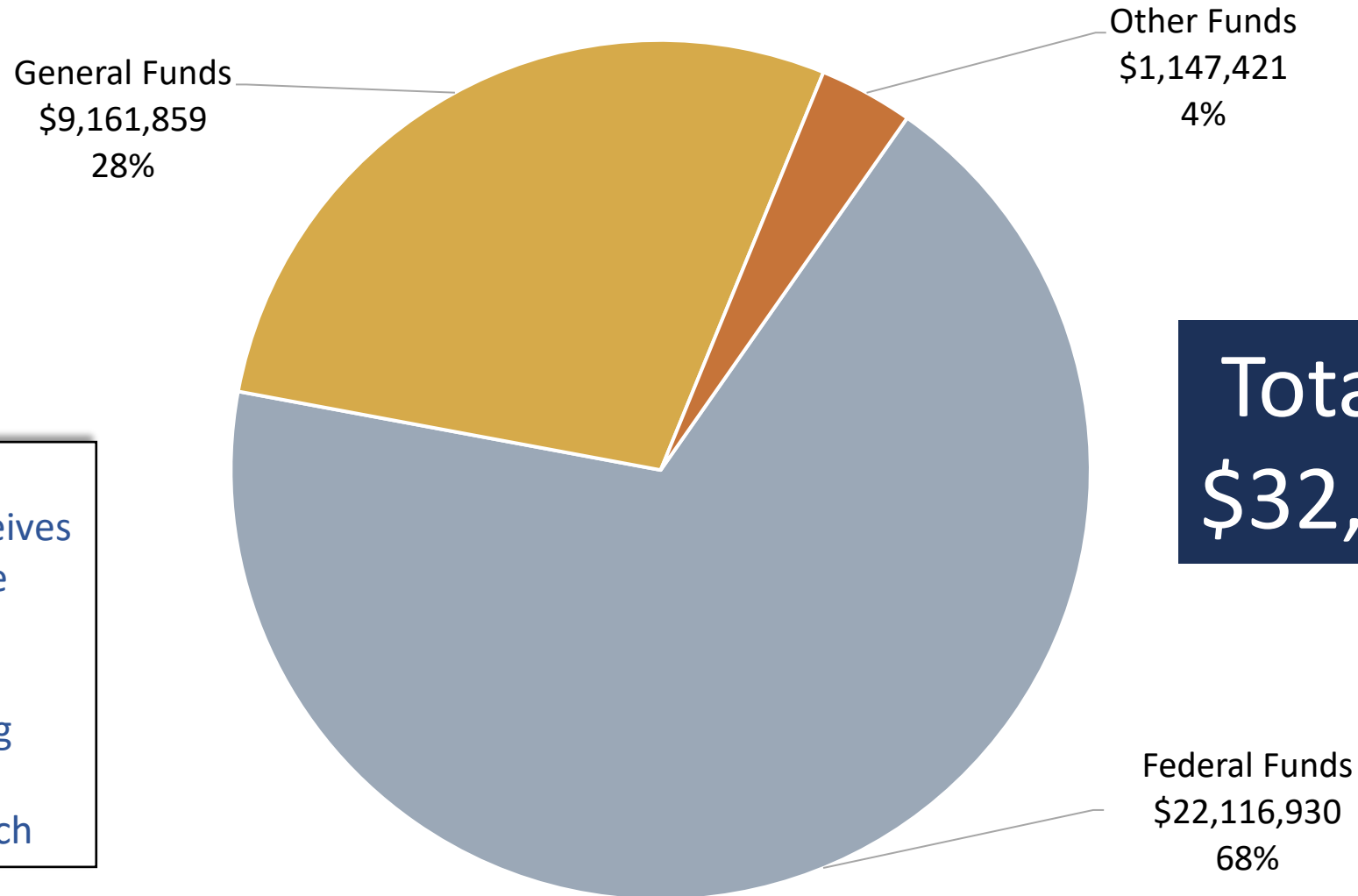
Package 101 Aging in Oregon

Adds .75 FTE (to begin January 2026) to expand the agency's capacity to serve seniors who experience vision loss who require assistance to remain independent in their home and community.

Package 090 Analyst Adjustments

Provides funding to reclassify agency positions consistent with the DAS CHRO Classification and Compensation analysis and recommendations.

2025-27 GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET

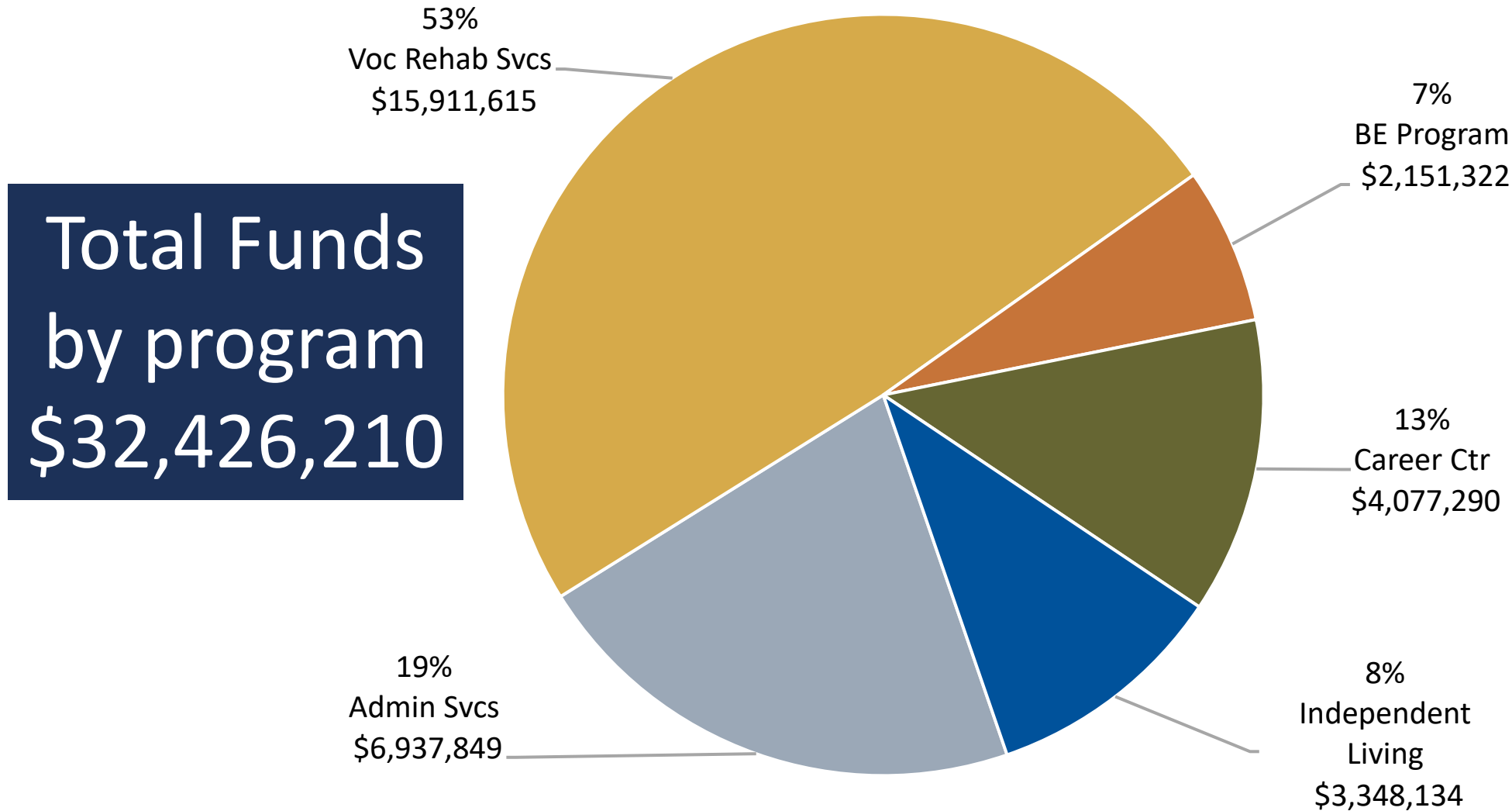


Vocational Rehabilitation receives a **4:1** Federal/State Match

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

Total Funds
\$32,426,210

2025-27 GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET



SUMMARY OF REDUCTION OPTIONS

The agency's budget is largely made of up two categories:

✓ **Special Payments:**
Services such as training, education, adaptative devices, counseling, technology equipment, etc.

✓ **Personal Services:**
Costs for personnel who directly serve clients.

- Reduction of services on behalf of clients and personal services have the same result: Less services available to Oregonians who are blind.
- General Fund reductions to the agency could result in a loss of Federal Funds at a 4:1 and 9:1 rate depending on where the cuts are taken.

LONG TERM VACANCY REPORT

One position meets the criteria for a long-term vacancy

- Position is a **Rehabilitation Instructor** for the Blind based in Lane County
- Currently in a **national recruitment** to fill the position
- Hopeful and optimistic that the position will be filled in the next quarter

Our impact:

OCB PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE

- **\$29.98** - Average VR Client wage at placement in FFY 2024.
- **73** - Currently employed VR clients as of January 2025.
- **96%** - ILOB clients who increased independence in FFY 2024.
- **26.6 days** - Time from ILOB referral to application in Q4 2024.
- **15.4 days** - Time from VR Application to Eligibility Q4 2024 .
- **26.3 days** - Time from VR Eligibility to Plan in FFY 2024.

How we're doing:

OVERVIEW- AGENCY KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES (KPM)

KPM #1 EMPLOYMENT:

2023 – 41.7%; 2024 – 42%

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

2023 – 91%; 2024 – 93%

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

2023 – 89.5%; 2024 – 93.6%

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

2023 – 99%; 2024 – 97.3%

Percent of total best practices met by the Commission as self assessed by members of 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!**

78.7% Federal Funds

21.3% General Fund

**Services have a positive
Economic Impact for Oregon**

In FFY 2024:

Individuals closed as successfully
employed earned combined total wages:

\$1,874,403

**ESTIMATED
FEDERAL TAXES
PAID**

\$187,440

**ESTIMATED
STATE TAXES
PAID**

\$168,696

**Having a job increases
one's ability to rely on
income to cover personal
and household needs.**

**Successfully Employed
Clients are:**

*Less likely to be dependent
(with reduced reliance) on
public assistance programs
to meet basic needs.*

*More likely to have employer-paid
health insurance or able to
contribute toward the cost of
their healthcare.*

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 a senior remains independent; 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.

76%

of Oregon residents \geq 55 who experience vision loss live independently.

In FFY 2024, 910 older blind served (of 1,199), were still living in their own homes.



Thank you

Questions/Follow up:

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