

January 28, 2025



Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and members of the Senate Committee on Healthcare,

The Human Services of Coalition (HSCO) would like to express our strong support for Senate Bill 161, which addresses critical workforce development challenges for Community Health Workers (CHWs), Community Paramedics (CPs), and local public health (LPH) departments in Oregon.

HSCO promotes the dignity of all Oregonians through improved public policy and strengthened support for human services, including the dedicated and talented individuals who administer services to Oregonians in every corner of the state. Our network of members provide life-saving support to Oregon's most vulnerable residents. This bill represents a much-needed investment in the health workforce and will help ensure that Oregon communities have access to essential services.

CHWs are in high demand for the important role they play as a community link to available health and social services, facilitating connections to resources and improving access to care. Despite the demonstrated impact of their work, resources to support the training and development of these professionals is limited. **This gap hinders access to care and prevents individuals from entering and advancing within this essential profession.** SB 161's proposal to allocate funding to the Oregon Community Health Workers Association (ORCHWA) will enable the expansion of training programs and provide crucial support for CHWs to serve the diverse needs of our communities.

Similarly, Community Paramedics (CPs) are an emerging provider type that has shown significant promise in reducing emergency department utilization, 911 call volume, and 30-day readmissions. These programs have demonstrated success in other states, but in Oregon, CPs lack the necessary support and resources to thrive. Senate Bill 161's proposed funding to the Oregon Mobile Integrated Health Coalition (ORMIHC) will provide the resources needed to develop and sustain Community Paramedic programs, improving health outcomes and reducing strain on our emergency services.

Local public health departments, particularly in rural and underserved areas, are facing severe workforce challenges. High rates of burnout, turnover, and difficulty in recruitment were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The need for skilled professionals in these areas is critical, but many communities lack access to higher education, which further complicates recruitment. Senate Bill 161's funding to the Oregon Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO) will help address these challenges by supporting workforce development, training, and retention, ensuring that public health departments can continue to serve our communities effectively.

HSCO believes that Senate Bill 161 offers a comprehensive solution to these pressing issues. By providing targeted funding to organizations like ORCHWA, ORMIHC, and CLHO, **the bill will foster growth in essential healthcare and public health sectors, expand training opportunities, and provide much-needed financial support to trainees and employers alike.**

We urge you to support Senate Bill 161 and take swift action to ensure that Oregon's healthcare and public health workforce is equipped to meet the challenges ahead. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Human Services Coalition of Oregon
www.oregonhsc.com