

February 5th, 2025

Oregon State Legislature
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Support of Healthier Oregon Program

Dear Co-Chairs Campos and Valderrama and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services,

Project Access NOW (PANOW) is a community-based organization providing access to health care and health-related resources for underserved communities in the Portland metro region and across Oregon. We're writing today to encourage you to **do the right thing for Oregonians and fully fund the Healthier Oregon Program in the 2025-2027 Medicaid budget.**

Last year, the rate of people with health insurance in Oregon rose to 97%, in large part due to programs like Healthier Oregon, which extended eligibility for the Oregon Health Plan to individuals of any immigration status who otherwise meet eligibility requirements. This program changed the lives of many Oregonians, providing consistent access to health care to a historically marginalized population. Many of these individuals had never had health insurance in the United States before, and had been forced to either avoid seeking needed care entirely, pay expensive out-of-pocket costs for the care they did seek, or receive donated care through organizations like Project Access NOW providing services to uninsured individuals. Thanks to Healthier Oregon, we've seen a sharp decline in need for donated care at PANOW since the rollout of the program.

However, simply changing eligibility requirements was only the first step. Efforts like Healthier Oregon are only successful with proper enrollment and utilization outreach to the communities that stand to benefit from them, and PANOW is proud to have partnered with the Oregon Health Authority and other community organizations in enrollment and benefits assistance since the rollout of Healthier Oregon in 2022. PANOW has enrolled over 1,500 individuals in the Healthier Oregon Program and made over 2,000 instances of benefits navigation support for Healthier Oregon enrollees.

Organizations like PANOW are only able to provide this assistance via critical funding from the Healthier Oregon Outreach and System Navigation Grant Program. Without this funding, enrollment and utilization will fall, and Oregon will take a large step back in its mandated journey towards health equity by the year 2030. To achieve that goal, every person in Oregon should have access to the health care they need to thrive. **Please fully fund the Healthier Oregon Program, as well as the organizations and navigators who help connect people to the program and understand their benefits every day across our state.** This program is a critical lifeline for some of our most vulnerable Oregonians.

Thank you,

Peter Merritt
Public Affairs Manager
Project Access NOW