

February 18, 2025

Re: Support for House Bill 5025 - Additional Funding for Public Health Modernization



Dear Co-Chairs Senator Campos and Representative Valderrama and Members of the Joint Subcommittee On Human Services:

My name is Hongcheng Zhao, and I am the President of the Oregon Chinese Coalition (OCC), a community-based organization (CBO) serving Chinese Americans across the state of Oregon. Since our founding in 2017, OCC has not only provided direct services but has also redefined the role of a CBO in shaping community identity, fostering mutual respect, and strengthening civic engagement. As a result, we have built an unprecedented level of trust within our community — trust that has empowered us to improve the well-being and health of our members in profound ways.

The OHA engaged CBOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, a decision that had lasting and transformative consequences. It opened the door to integrating CBOs into public health efforts, recognizing our deep-rooted connections and unique ability to bridge gaps in care. OCC was honored to be part of this movement. For over a year and a half, we mobilized hundreds of community members daily to assist with vaccinations at LeCare Pharmacy — an effort that earned them one of four national recognitions from the CDC.

We embraced OHA's Public Health Modernization initiative wholeheartedly, as we had witnessed the critical gaps in public health at the community level. Since then, OCC has been a driving force in modernization efforts, launching key initiatives within the Chinese American community while fostering partnerships with other CBOs, LPHAs, and government entities at all levels.

Public health is not just about access to medical care — it is about the well-being of the entire community. It affects every stage of life, from youth navigating between cultures, to parents balancing work and family responsibilities, to elderly individuals striving to age with dignity. Health outcomes are deeply intertwined with social determinants, and we have seen firsthand how addressing these factors can transform lives.

One example stands out: While delivering a portable AC unit to a family, we noticed cigarette butts at the doorstep. A simple conversation revealed that the husband, who had suffered a stroke two years prior, had not received a single physical therapy session due to language barriers, lack of transportation, and overwhelming frustration with the healthcare system. Meanwhile, his wife, a restaurant worker, was struggling to keep their household afloat. Faced with eviction and compounding health challenges, they had nowhere to turn.

Because OCC has been a strong partner in both tobacco prevention and rental assistance, we were able to intervene — helping them access the support they desperately needed while guiding them through the complex healthcare system. Stories like this are not rare. They are a testament to the power of trusted, community-driven solutions.

Recognizing the need for accessible health and social services, we launched our own Community Health Fair in 2023. More than just an event for health education and screenings, it serves as a bridge — connecting community members with essential services and empowering them with knowledge. Each year, we fill an entire ballroom, yet we still struggle to accommodate the demand from partners eager to engage with nearly a thousand participants. These events foster not only service delivery but also meaningful, two-way conversations between providers and the communities they serve.

Our experience makes one thing clear: investing in public health modernization is a smart investment. It is an opportunity to build a system that truly serves the people — one that integrates CBOs as an essential part of the public health infrastructure. As you consider this funding, I urge you to recognize the transformative potential of this model and seize the opportunity to advance the vision of a healthier Oregon.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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