



Feb 10, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Human Services Ways & Means Committee:

My name is Margarita Gutierrez-Lemus, Executive Director of Familias en Acción (Familias). Familias is a culturally specific organization, whose programs are dedicated to reducing the exclusion of underrepresented and marginalized Latiné communities from economic, health, and social equity. Our mission is to advance Latiné health and wellness through education, supportive services, and programs that uplift community wisdom and strength. All of our services are culturally responsive to the Latiné communities in Oregon and are delivered in Spanish (primarily) and English (on occasion) through bilingual, bicultural staff. Our five programs include: Nutritional Health, Health Navigation, Sexual Health, Climate and Health, CHW Workforce.

Oregon's public health system includes federal, state, counties and local agencies, private organizations, community-based organizations, and other partners. Our organization represents one of the 195 community-based organizations that receives Public Health Modernization funding through the Oregon Health Authority.

As integral partners in the public health systems, community-based organizations work to minimize health risks and improve health outcomes. Community-based organizations strengthen the state's capacity to respond to emerging issues that threaten the health of Oregonians. CBOs are trusted within their local communities and are uniquely positioned to reach rural community members, people with disabilities, tribal members and other culturally specific groups who are at greater risk of health disparities.

Our public health modernization funding has allowed us to respond to a direct request from the Oregon Latiné community to learn more about climate change and actions they can take on their own to protect their health, reduce their contributions to climate change, and strengthen their local community. We are the only program that is consistently providing education on the connection between climate change and health and providing concrete action steps to prepare for climate emergencies for the Spanish speaking communities in Oregon.

We developed a series of emergency preparedness workshops and provide comprehensive emergency preparedness kits to predominantly low income Latiné families. We also developed and host a new training for community health workers. This training combines systems level thinking with concrete actions that CHWs can take in their own lives and prepares them to recognize and feel confident in responding to the impacts of climate change on the people they serve in their work.



We discuss the connection between mental health and the impacts of climate change as well as the importance of connecting with neighbors because those are the people that will need to support one another in the face of serious natural disasters.

All our offerings have been enthusiastically received with participants reporting significant learning and increased confidence in their ability to prepare for a variety of climate related emergencies. Each CHW cohort has formed its own group outside of the training to remain connected and continue supporting one another beyond the training.

OHA's Current Public Health Modernization Budget is \$110M General Fund and represents essential funding for Local Public Health Authorities, Tribal, OHA and community-based organizations like ours who are working in partnership with the State. Since the pandemic, the public health system has been building up the capacity to address public health needs throughout the state, but there is a great deal more work to be done as threats to our health and well-being persist.

We are requesting an additional investment of \$25M into public health modernization budget. The additional \$2M proposed in the Governor's recommended budget does not provide the level of funding that is truly needed to address the unmet public health needs that exist in our state.

There is a deep need to continue bringing facts about climate change and concrete action steps to the Latiné communities of Oregon. Now more than ever, we need to counter false narratives that climate change is a hoax or that there is nothing we can do. Familias en Acción serves individuals and families with multiple climate vulnerabilities. Without this continued funding, vulnerable community members will be unprepared, risk serious and expensive health consequences, and be more reliant on external services in the face of climate extremes.

Thank you for your consideration of this important investment in Oregon's public health capacity, and for the opportunity to share the work we are doing in communities across the state.

Member of CHEC - Community Health Equity Coalition

The Community Health Equity Coalition represents dozens of Community-Based Organizations who are an integral part of Oregon's Public Health System.