



March 5, 2025

Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and Members of the House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services:

The Oregon Gerontological Association endorses HB 3497.

Who we are

OGA is a professional organization open to all to improve the lives of older adults and those who support them. There is a permanent demographic shift toward older adults, and OGA helps ensure that we have the policies, education and resources to thrive in an age-friendly state.

The issues

Experts in the field of aging agree that an Oregon Multisector Plan on Aging is sorely needed now to prevent a variety of crises impacting communities statewide. Small actions today, upstream, will have positive results for decades to come.

While the current state plan on aging succeeds within a framework of the Older American's Act, **the majority of older adults do not receive state aid or Medicaid services.** A "blueprint" for state government, local government, the private sector, and philanthropy is needed now to meet the needs of demographic changes and to continue Oregon's leadership in aging, disability, and equity. Time is of the essence because the population of persons 65 years and older has outnumbered the number of children under the age of 18 since 2023 and the shift will continue to grow.¹

Perhaps nowhere is this more urgent than in rural Oregon. Elderly residents in rural Oregon face significant health challenges due to geographic isolation, limited healthcare access, and socioeconomic disparities. Approximately 35% of Oregonians reside in rural areas, with 44% of them aged 65 or older, highlighting a substantial aging population in these regions.

Key issues impacting rural elderly health include:

- **Healthcare Accessibility:** Many rural areas are designated as "medically underserved," with nearly 80% of rural America lacking adequate healthcare facilities, including skilled nursing and intensive care units.
- **Chronic Health Conditions:** Rural seniors often experience higher rates of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity, exacerbated by limited access to preventive care and specialized treatments.

¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/das/oea/Documents/demographic.pdf>

- **Socioeconomic Challenges:** Rural communities face higher poverty rates, with 15.6% living below the poverty line compared to 11.5% in urban areas, leading to financial barriers to healthcare.

While the Oregon Office of Rural Health works to enhance healthcare quality and accessibility for rural residents who are increasingly diverse and require culturally competent services, there are still major gaps. Additionally, rural areas often lag in providing other age-friendly services.

Now is the time to forge strategies and policies to help create a vibrant future for all. A simple first step is the pass this bill to create a task force focused on preparing the state for the generational shift to an older population, specifically in the areas of housing, overall health, paid and unpaid caregiving, workforce, and economic vitality.² **Rest assured, OGA will be happy to serve as a resource or help in this endeavor in any way we can.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Chair, OGA Policy Committee

Other citations:

[Western University
ruralhealthinfo.org
ruralhealthinfo.org](https://www.western.edu/ruralhealthinfo.org)

² <https://www.oregon.gov/das/oea/Documents/demographic.pdf>