

Klamath County Public Health

April 25, 2025

2025 Oregon Legislature Joint Ways and Means Committee
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Senator Lieber, Representative Sanchez and members of the Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Jennifer Little. I'm the Director of Klamath County Public Health. This comes to you to express my strong support for public health funding, which includes public health modernization, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, nurse home visiting, and addiction primary prevention.

Public Health Modernization

First, the importance of Public Health Modernization. The Coalition of Local Health Officials is asking for \$25 million for the 2025-27 biennium.

Ten years after the Oregon Legislature prioritized public health modernization, only about one-third of the money needed to fund these foundational programs fully has been received. It's local public health departments that help mitigate communicable diseases, prepare for and respond to public health threats, and work towards policy, systems, and environmental improvement.

At Klamath County Public Health, we've been able to maximize our modernization dollars and hire important positions we've historically lacked. For example, for the first time we were able to hire a part-time epidemiologist, an emergency preparedness coordinator and health equity coordinator. We were also able to expand our environmental health work to include outreach and education for our licensed facility operators, such as restaurants, as well as develop a climate adaptation plan. We still have plans to improve our capabilities, but we need the Legislature to approve this additional modernization funding to get us there.

WIC/Babies First/CaCoon

I urge you to support \$10.2 million in state funding for early childhood programs in public health – specifically the Women Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program and the nurse home visiting programs, Babies First and CaCoon. CaCoon serves children with special health needs and Babies First serves children under five who have social, emotional and medical risk factors.

Nurse home visiting has decades of evidence showing cost savings and long-term benefits. The same is true for the 50-year old federal WIC program, where families who participate have better nutrition, healthier babies and improved access to medical care. Federal funding does not fully cover the costs of either program. The proposed funding will provide \$6.2 million to match federal dollars for the CaCoon and Babies First programs and \$4 million for the WIC program. With only one home visiting nurse for our

Babies First and CaCoon programs serving a county the size of Connecticut, we lack capacity to truly meet the needs of families with children with high medical needs or those experiencing disabilities. This funding could support an additional home visiting nurse and sustain our WIC program, which provides healthy foods, lactation support and resource referrals for over 1,700 Klamath County families. These programs are critical for helping the youngest Oregonians grow and thrive.

Addiction Primary Prevention

Finally, I'm urging your support for HB 2954 to fund Addiction Primary Prevention.

Alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs kill more than 12,000 Oregonians each year. Yet, Oregon spends 94% of its substance use dollars on treatment and recovery, leaving only 6% for prevention, most of which is earmarked only for tobacco through Ballot Measure 108. That means public health has no dedicated state funding to prevent alcohol and drug misuse.

The federal government has historically provided \$5 million per year for prevention, money that is divided between 36 counties, nine tribes, and nine community organizations. In most counties, this is not enough to hire one full-time prevention specialist.

The substance use crisis takes an emotional toll on people who use drugs, their families and other loved ones. It takes a financial toll on all of us, with an estimated societal and economic cost of \$6 billion per year. We cannot afford to continue on this destructive path – we need a path paved with primary prevention.

The local public health workforce members are experts at primary prevention, which has saved millions of lives when funded and prioritized. Think about how far we have come with anti-smoking, teen pregnancy and bike helmet campaigns. Also, success with laws requiring seat belts and car seats. Primary prevention saves lives and money!

That's why I'm asking you to support HB 2954, which will allocate \$25 million per biennium so all counties and tribes can hire at least one staff person dedicated to primary prevention.

The path to a healthy, productive, society starts with public health and primary prevention. Please make good on the Legislature's promise to invest in public health infrastructure through modernization, early childhood programs, and primary prevention.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Little, MPH

Director, Klamath County Public Health