

# 2014 Oregon General Assistance Study



**Presented March 4, 2015**

PSU Regional Research Institute for Human Services

Karen Cellarius (cellark@pdx.edu)

# Background:

- ⇒ Requested by the Oregon legislature and DHS
  - DHS Aging and People with Disability Services
- ⇒ Completed June –December 2014:
- ⇒ Data sources:
  - Background documents and studies
  - Over one hundred people from 11 Oregon counties and 7 states.
    - ✓ Childless adults with disabilities
    - ✓ Key informants in the fields of disabilities, physical and mental healthcare, employment, corrections, and veterans affairs
    - ✓ General Assistance researchers and administrators from multiple states, including Utah, Washington, Nevada, and Vermont.

## Study Questions:

1. What already exists within Oregon and other states?
2. What is the need today?
3. What potential program structures and funding options might address the needs of the target population, while also addressing any barriers with the previous program?

# Findings:

- ✓ Federal disability benefits are available, but the rigorous and lengthy application process makes them hard to get
- ✓ Childless adults with severe disabilities have multiple needs that make it even more difficult to go through this process on their own
- ✓ These disabilities and needs can be hidden
- ✓ Resources to meet basic needs of this population are limited, especially in the area of housing

## Findings (Continued):

- ✓ States can provide temporary disability benefits and be reimbursed for them once federal benefits are awarded.
- ✓ Administrative costs can be minimized by utilizing existing programs;
- ✓ Administrative costs of such a program could be offset by savings in health care, homeless assistance, and public safety.
- ✓ Can increase federal Social Security benefits flowing into Oregon:
  - National first time success rate for obtaining federal Social Security benefits=30%
  - Success rate reported by multiple Oregon programs = 70%

# Proposed Pilot Program for General Assistance

- ✓ “Housing First” model
- ✓ Enroll and serve participants from the existing, statewide Presumptive Medicaid caseload
- ✓ Leverage existing staff and resources
- ✓ Gather additional information on costs and potential outcomes of reinstating General Assistance in Oregon.

## Comments from GA Study Respondents:

“I was a very proud person and it was difficult for me to ask for help.” – Lane County



“It would be nice to have money for clothes and toiletries.” – Multnomah County



“I feel like a burden to my partner. If I had some financial support, my depression, anger, agitation wouldn't be as bad.” – Central OR



“It is really brutal [on the streets] when you are counting on SSI to be approved and then it isn't over and over again.” – Multnomah County



“After four years of getting denied for services and living in car, I am relieved to now have a place.”  
– Lane County