



**Oregon State University**  
**College of Public Health  
and Human Sciences**

**Office of the Dean**  
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December 14, 2018

Senate Interim Committee on Human Services  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE, Room 453  
Salem, Oregon 97301

**RE: Oregon State University Community Health & Resilience Initiative**

Dear Members of the Senate Interim Committee on Human Services,

The Oregon State University College of Public Health and Human Sciences is honored to introduce our Community Health & Resilience Initiative, designed to promote well-being across our state. Thank you for the opportunity to share with the committee this plan to further our vision of *lifelong health and well being for every person, every family, and every community*.

**The Problem**

Oregonians are independent, hard-working, and innovative, yet many Oregon communities struggle with economic and health challenges related to poverty, inadequate housing, unemployment, food insecurity, and low high school graduation rates. In this context, the social and emotional health of our communities are in crisis. OHA's *21st Century Oregon Behavioral Health Action Plan* lists suicide as the second leading cause of death for young adults in Oregon. Also reported in the *Action Plan*, approximately 1 in 6 teenagers (14.6%) have experienced a major depressive episode in the last year, and less than half of these youth received treatment.<sup>1</sup> Further, in spite of greater awareness of the devastating long-term impacts of adverse childhood experiences,<sup>2</sup> child abuse, neglect, and bullying continue to be all too common across Oregon and the nation.

In order to address the underlying, upstream social determinants of this crisis, we must invest in families and their communities' health and resilience. This investment will create a vibrant future for all and enhance the social and economic environment in our communities, including the viability of the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industries our citizens depend on.

**A Statewide Solution**

In accordance with our land-grant mission, Oregon State University stands ready to be part of the solution. By contributing to efforts to address current problems and by investing *upstream* to prevent future problems, we can leverage the Oregon State University Extension Service to build community capacity for implementing *locally-relevant* health, well-being and resilience initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oregon.gov/OHA/HSD/AMH/Pages/Youth-Suicide-Prevention.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>

We propose expanding the existing Family and Community Health and 4-H Extension programs, which have a long history of effective health promotion efforts in every Oregon county. This Community Health & Resilience Initiative will embed a new county-based network of locally recruited community health workers (“Healthy Oregon Connectors”) specifically trained in community engagement skills to facilitate development of community-specific, locally-relevant solutions for pressing health and resilience needs.

The work of the Healthy Oregon Connectors will be that of a convener to:

- Connect and coordinate cross-sector community stakeholders towards collective impact, increasing economic opportunity and social cohesion
- Contribute to assessing and meeting local needs
- Offer, upon request, trainings and specialized health interventions
- Expand community-driven research programs linking to OSU health sciences expertise
- Enhance youth development including college and career readiness, and skill development for emerging industries

As a public land grant university, OSU serves as the people’s university, reaching into every county in the state through county-based Extension faculty. Our Extension network is a ready platform for leveraging a broader community-based campaign to improve community health and resilience across the state.

We propose a staged roll-out in select counties, supported by “specialist” supervisory faculty housed at the College of Public Health and Human Sciences. At full implementation, the network of 36 Healthy Oregon Connectors, one per county, will integrate into the existing networked resources of Extension services and county public health. Partnerships with coordinated care organizations (CCO’s) will be sought. Evaluation and dissemination of the successful strategies would be part of the supervisory faculty responsibilities, as would teaching to promote a prepared workforce.

### **The “Statewides” Legislative Opportunity**

Funding resources to implement the Community Health & Resilience Initiative are packaged with the Oregon State University “Statewides” legislative concept, sponsored by Oregon Senator Arnie Roblan, Chair of the Senate Interim Committee on Education. The 2019-21 biennium legislative concept would appropriate an additional \$30 million to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission for Oregon State University’s agricultural experiment station and branch stations (\$16M), Oregon State University Extension Service (\$11.5M), and Forest Research Laboratory programs (\$2.5M).

Together, the “Statewides” efforts enhance economic opportunity; create resilient and healthy food systems; provide equitable access, programs, and partnerships that build social capital; leverage existing community capacity; and, address complex issues while nurturing future leaders.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present this work to your committee. Please reach out directly if you have questions or insights as we further our vision.

Sincerely,  
F. Javier Nieto, MD, MPH, PhD  
Dean, OSU College of Public Health and Human Sciences