



February 9th, 2020

Chairs Lieber and Nosse and Committee Members
 Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

Dear Chairs Lieber and Nosse and Committee Members:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and our thousands of members statewide, we would like to express our support for the full ARB \$68.9 million investment in public health modernization initially submitted by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). While

we recognize the Governor's Recommended Budget updated the request to \$30 million, this investment will be used to foster public health and climate resilience and should be funded to the fullest extent possible.

As illustrated by OHA's *Climate and Health in Oregon 2020* report, climate change has already begun affecting the health of people in Oregon and will only continue to worsen unless investments to address these threats are made today. The COVID-19 pandemic has starkly exposed existing health disparities in Oregon. Climate change exacerbates those inequalities and disproportionate burdens felt by lower-income Oregonians, Black, Indigenous, and people of color, and frontline workers impacted by extreme heat, wildfire smoke, water insecurity, air pollution, and other climate health stressors.

According to a 2016 assessment of Oregon's public health system, 97% of local public health authorities are under-equipped to identify and address existing and future environmental health hazards, including climate driven threats such as wildfires, drought, water insecurity, heat, and floods. Oregon's Public Health Modernization Plan identified the investments needed at the state and local level to achieve a modern public health system that protects health for all in Oregon and addresses health inequities between low-income/Oregonians of color and wealthier Oregonians. This funding will allow for climate-related strategies to be integrated into OHA's State Health Improvement Plan, [*Healthier Together Oregon*](#).

Fully funding OHA's current request will:

- Allow the public health system at all levels to adequately build internal capacity;
- Staff and support local public health authorities who are collecting comprehensive health data to identify and mitigate the risks to human health and disproportionate impacts on communities experiencing racism and oppression;
- Support tribal public health authorities; and
- Invest in the local and community-based expertise and partnerships needed to lead public health interventions amongst our most vulnerable communities.

As advocacy groups dedicated to advancing strong public health and climate protections, we are especially pleased that OHA's modernization request will, for the first time, consider environmental health investments to support community-based organizations and the governmental public health system, with a priority on addressing climate-driven environmental health concerns. This means that this Legislature has the power to sufficiently invest in local authorities, tribal health authorities, and community-based organizations focusing on matters such as mitigating heat-related illnesses for frontline workers.

Simply put, without fully investing in public health modernization, health and environmental inequities will continue.

Sincerely,

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350 Eugene

Ujuonu Nwizu
Oregon Health Equity Alliance

Phil Carver, Co-coordinator
350 Salem Oregon

Olivia Quiroz
Oregon Latino Health Coalition

Lisa Arkin, Executive Director
Beyond Toxics

Julia DeGraw, Coalition Director
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Penny Okamoto, Executive Director
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Ania Ty, Fellow
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We Can Do Better