

Chair Reynolds and members of the House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services.

My Name is Stephanie Hooper and I represent AGE+. We are a statewide nonprofit that empowers communities of all ages to value and care for older adults, especially those who are isolated, low-income and underserved. We do this through advocacy, education, convening stakeholders, building collaborative partnerships, and innovative program development. Our staff bring decades of expertise in the field of aging and bringing communities together to support the aging process.

As you know, Oregon's demographics are rapidly changing. Essentially, our population structure is moving from a pyramid to a pillar in less than 10 years.

This shift is inescapable, permanent and touches us all — as individuals, workers, employers, family members, and community members. And it will touch all sectors – health care, housing, business, education and more. Without action, this shift has the potential to compound disparities at the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, poverty and across geography such as rural areas.

In 2020 AGE+ began engaging with individual stakeholders in rural and urban areas and among communities of color through town halls, one on one interviews and a statewide survey. We've reached every county in Oregon and the participation has been evenly split between among rural and urban. A key takeaway is that citizens are not confident their community is prepared to support them to age well.

This shift will not only bring challenges, but it is also an opportunity to re-think our approach and what it means for our communities to thrive at any age. Older Adults are valuable contributors, experienced workers, caregivers and volunteers. We need stronger pathways to keep them engaged.

We have an opportunity to capture this moment to be thoughtful and act with purpose to advance statewide goals and policies centered on aging well throughout an individual's lifespan. The data tells us we have a responsibility AND URGENCY to do so.

Oregon has no cohesive strategy to successfully navigate this significant change. A multi-sector plan, that is done well and is resourced, will lift all people and all sectors will benefit. Our singular message today is to convey that we can no longer delay. We are already behind. We must start the planning process now. A multi-sector plan will provide a roadmap for Oregon.

We ask for your support of HB2869 as a step towards a brighter shared future for all Oregonians.