



Date: March 20, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means - Human Services Subcommittee

From: Oregon Health Equity Alliance

RE: Support SB 5525

Dear Co-chair Campos, Co-chair Valderrama, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Ujuonu Nwizu and I am writing on behalf of Oregon Health Equity Alliance in support of SB 5525, particularly the request to invest \$286 million in further modernizing our statewide public health system, including \$100 million to support community-based organizations (CBOs).

OHEA is a people of color-led collaborative, organized to center and uplift the wisdom of our communities of color through racial justice-informed health equity policies and practices as part of the movement to dismantle white supremacy and shift the imbalance of power. OHEA serves Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington counties as one of ten regional health equity coalitions across Oregon.

Investing in our public health system, especially CBOs, is crucial for advancing health equity in our state. The COVID-19 pandemic and other public health crises such as MPXV, wildfires, and severe winter storms, have exacerbated health inequities and placed many communities in critical situations that they are still navigating. Increased investments are needed if we are to achieve Oregon Health Authority's goal of eliminating inequities by 2030. Supporting this request rectifies years of underinvestment, uplifting the health of all Oregonians and bolstering our ability to respond and prevent future crises in our state.

Furthermore, CBOs are a crucial part of our public health system, especially in supporting marginalized communities most impacted by health inequities. Through OHA funding, more than 170 CBOs have provided essential COVID-19 services and support, including education, testing, vaccination, contact tracing, housing support, food distribution, and wraparound services. This funding has particularly enabled smaller, grassroots CBOs to fill gaps in public health services and provide key insights into community needs and solutions given their long-standing relationships with communities.

These investments during the pandemic demonstrate what's possible with adequate funding. However, more funding is necessary as COVID-19 persists and community members continue to face precarious situations due to other factors, including rising costs of living and climate

disasters. Additionally, Long COVID continues to affect communities with many noting difficulties getting the care and support needed to navigate this chronic condition. Moreover, various communities still lag in vaccination and COVID booster rates, putting them at severe risk of disease and death. Lastly, the public health emergency declaration is soon scheduled to end in May, which will reduce some of the COVID-related services and support available to the community. This may, in turn, place Oregonians in new precarious situations with less support available. Ultimately, while the emergency declaration will be ending, the need has not and may increase from here.

POP 406 will be instrumental in modernizing Oregon's public health system and supporting its ability to respond to the needs and issues described above. While we recognize the Governor's proposal to add \$50 million, we urge you to support the full request of \$286 million, which is more aligned with the current need. Such funding will support and expand the services CBOs and other public health system partners can provide, as well as provide us with the capacity to build and improve partnerships to support our communities across the state.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Ujuonu Nwizu
Co-Director
Oregon Health Equity Alliance