

Oregon Project Independence (OPI)

Members of NorthWest Senior & Disability Services Senior Advisory Council and Disability Services Advisory Council are concerned about state funding for Oregon Project Independence, OPI. OPI helps older Oregonians delay their entry into higher cost care settings by providing needed in-home services. By investing in OPI, Oregon supports a proven model of care that saves state funds and helps older adults live where most want to live – in their own homes.

One of our concerns is that OPI received only a \$12.6 million funding allocation this biennium, which is essentially flat funding. OPI is now entirely funded from the Senior Property Tax Deferral Program, which is not a stable source of funding. We also note that future funding for OPI is in question since all general fund dollars were removed this biennium. Since OPI no longer receives state general fund dollars, there is no longer a placeholder in the authorized state budget for general fund allocations.

In addition, funds were not allocated in 2005 or 2007 to expand OPI services to people with physical disabilities, which was the intent of the 2005 Legislature. This omission must be rectified so OPI can serve Oregonians with physical disabilities, age 18 to 65, who need assistance because of chronic conditions or injuries.

Finally, though some contribute on a sliding fee scale to the cost of their OPI services, there are many older adults and people with physical disabilities who are not needy enough to qualify for Medicaid and not wealthy enough to pay for their own care. These are Oregonians with modest means caught in a gap. These are Oregonians who could benefit from OPI services today, so they can delay or prevent the need for costlier care tomorrow.

The creation of Oregon Project Independence by the 1975 Legislature provided in-home services to seniors who could no longer meet their own care needs. It also provided the bricks and mortar to create Oregon's cost-effective, long-term care system, a system that was nationally recognized for its ability to help older adults and adults with physical disabilities remain independent by serving them early, stabilizing them through active care management, and providing risk intervention. We urge the strengthening of Oregon's long-term care system by increasing funding for OPI.