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Themed Age Strong! Live Long! May is Older Americans Month

May is Older Americans Month — a tradition dating back to 1963 to honor the legacies and ongoing contributions of older Americans and support them in this stage in life. Oregon Department of Human Services and its providers and partners throughout Oregon are joining communities nationwide in celebrating Older Americans Month.

This year's Older Americans Month theme — *Age Strong! Live Long!* — recognizes the diversity and vitality of today's older Americans who span three generations. In a state proclamation recognizing May as Older Americans Month in Oregon, Governor Ted Kulongoski noted that increasing numbers of Oregonians are living longer and remaining strong and active for longer than ever before.

Among Oregon's 3.8 million inhabitants, 502,000, or 13 percent, are age 65 or older. However, by 2030 statewide population is projected to reach 4.9 million, with 951,000 Oregonians age 65 and older — a 20 percent share. In other words, two decades from now one in five Oregonians will be 65 or older. Today 18,000 seniors receive Medicaid-funded services; that number will rise to almost 35,000 by 2030. Today 27,000 seniors receive SNAP — formerly known as food stamps; that number will rise to approximately 51,000 by 2030.

"The growth of the number of seniors will have an impact on our state with the need for more services and programs to accommodate this big population shift," says James Toews, director of Oregon DHS Seniors and People with Disabilities Division. "DHS is busily preparing for this with an increased focus on health promotion and health awareness, enhanced focus on early information and referral assistance, and an increased focus on personal responsibility," he said.

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The Living Well workshop is one example. Developed by Stanford University, this course teaches real-life skills for living a full, healthy life with a chronic illness. As we age, conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, asthma and heart disease can be challenging.

“Older adults have much to contribute to Oregon, and evidence-based programs like ‘Living Well’ help participants manage their on-going health needs and continue to be actively involved in their communities,” said Jennifer Mead, DHS healthy aging coordinator.

Recently, the State of Oregon received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for \$478,873 to continue to run these workshops. To find one near you, visit www.healthoregon.org/livingwell and click on “Find a Workshop.”

In preparation for the increase in the senior population, DHS has created the transition/diversion initiative, a program that helps individuals and families choose among the many long-term care alternatives available in Oregon. This initiative helps individuals transitioning out of nursing homes and other settings choose the level of care they would like. “Most often, people prefer to remain in their own homes,” Toews said. “This not only enhances their quality of life but also saves the taxpayers in funding a higher level of care,” he said.

The Department of Human Services website offers information and resources on issues that affect Oregon’s seniors, from learning about assistance programs or searching for an assisted living arrangement to finding healthy food, fun activities and opportunities in one’s local community. The website is: <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/spwpd> .

There are other opportunities around Oregon to pay tribute to Older Americans Month. In partnership with AARP, OSU Extended Campus and OSU Extension Service have designed an online program called “Mastery of Aging Well” consisting of five modules for anyone interested in healthy aging. The course, which can be completed on participants’ own time, provides practical, research-based solutions to many of the problems that older Americans or aging family members may be encountering. This is a free, web-based program that can help seniors or their caregivers live a healthier and more productive life. For more information, go to these websites:

http://www.aarp.org/states/or/news/articles/become_an_agemaster.html
<http://ecampus.oregonstate.edu/workforce/aging-well/>

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AARP also has a whole host of healthy aging and brain health resources, tips and publications: <http://www.aarp.org/health/healthyliving/> and http://www.aarp.org/health/healthyliving/brain_health/ — includes everything from “50 ways to work your noodle” and brain tip of the week to healthy recipes and activity calculators.

The annual commemoration of Older Americans Month is our opportunity to recognize the contributions of older citizens and join them in providing services and support that empower the elderly. Contact your local Area Agency on Aging by visiting <http://www.eldercare.gov> or calling 1-800-677-1116 to find out more about what you can do to strengthen services for older Americans this month and all year round in your community.

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