

Together We Plan

Community and Tribal Budget Sessions

Summary overview

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Together We Plan Community and Tribal Budget Sessions, both in person and virtually. We deeply appreciate the time, honesty and lived experience shared during these conversations.

These discussions are important because budget decisions are not just numbers on a page. They directly impact individuals, families, providers, and communities across Oregon. Your participation helps us better understand those impacts.

Information about upcoming sessions and community briefings will continue to be shared on the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) website.

Why these conversations matter

Participants consistently emphasized that:

- Budget decisions shape real lives and real services.
- Listening must be paired with transparency and follow-through.
- Clear communication builds trust, especially through uncertainty.
- Engagement should not be a one-time event but an ongoing process.

We also reaffirm our commitment to government-to-government relationships with the Nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon. The ODHS Office of Tribal Affairs will continue leading formal Tribal consultation in close partnership with Tribal leaders, following established policy and process.

What we heard

Across sessions, several consistent themes emerged:

1. Fear and uncertainty are real

Increased immigration enforcement activity, federal policy shifts, and funding changes have created instability. Providers and communities are struggling to plan when policies and budgets feel unpredictable.

Uncertainty makes it harder to sustain services and support for those who rely on them.

2. Some communities are disproportionately impacted

Participants named specific communities experiencing greater impacts, including:

- Immigrants and refugees
- Tribal communities
- African American communities
- People with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- People with disabilities (we heard specific challenges from the deaf and hard of hearing community)
- Older adults
- Families with children
- People living in rural areas

When resources are limited, smaller or historically underserved communities can be unintentionally overlooked.

3. The system can be hard to navigate

Eligibility rules, administrative requirements and grant processes often create barriers.

Participants shared that:

- Rules do not always reflect real-world needs.
- Changes to income thresholds, immigration status criteria, disability standards or age requirements can leave people without support.
- Administrative processes sometimes take time away from direct services.

There is a strong desire for simpler systems that focus on people first.

4. Communication must improve

Participants asked for:

- Plain language explanations of decisions
- Clear timelines
- Transparency about what is decided versus what is still being considered
- Honest discussion about limitations

People want to understand what shapes decisions—even when options are constrained.

5. Voice must lead to action

Participants were clear: listening is important, but follow-through matters more. There is a strong desire to:

- Be partners in decision-making
- Understand how feedback is used
- See how input shapes outcomes

Communities want clearer pathways to engage and advocate effectively.

6. We are connected

A recurring theme was interdependence. When one community loses housing, healthcare, food access or income, the effects ripple outward. Challenges are interconnected—and so is community strength.

What happens next

ODHS is committed to the following actions:

- Combining feedback from all winter budget sessions and sharing it with program leaders to inform planning.
- Continuing to hold program-specific and community-based conversations in March and April as the budget process unfolds.
- Providing updates about what is being heard statewide and how input is shaping decisions whenever possible.

- Continuing formal Tribal consultation through established government-to-government processes.
- Strengthening communication with clearer, more accessible updates.

We will also continue gathering feedback through surveys and follow-up engagement opportunities.

Our commitment

This process is ongoing. It is not a single meeting or a single decision point.

ODHS remains committed to:

- Openness and transparency
- Respectful engagement
- Clear communication
- Government-to-government partnership with Tribes
- Responsiveness to community impact

The Together We Plan sessions were an important step in strengthening coordination and ensuring that Oregon's systems remain accessible and responsive.

We are grateful for your partnership and your continued engagement.