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May 15, 2020

The Honorable Governor Kate Brown  
254 State Capitol  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Oregon Health Authority Response to Executive Order 20-04

Dear Governor Brown:

I am writing to report on the current and future actions of the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) relevant to your Executive Order (EO) 20-04, *Directing State Agencies to Take Actions to Reduce and Regulate Greenhouse Gas Emissions*. These include the general directives to state agencies in paragraph 3 of the EO, as well as three directives specific to OHA listed in paragraph 11. The information below provides background on the nexus among climate, health and equity, addresses how OHA will respond to the EO's general direction to agencies, and how OHA will address specific directives to our agency.

### Climate, Health and Equity

Changes in our climate are already occurring and increasing health risks in communities across Oregon. For example, during heat waves we see increases in heat-related emergency room visits, and during recent wildfire events we have seen increases in respiratory-related hospital visits. In the current COVID-19 crisis, there is evidence climate stressors like extreme heat and wildfire smoke may further exacerbate symptoms for people with COVID-19 and increase the risk of respiratory infections.

Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions has the potential to create multiple health co-benefits that improve population health. These health benefits arise from lowering people's exposure to "co-pollutants" that accompany GHG emissions, and through systemic changes such as infrastructure investments that encourage people to use active transportation options such as transit, biking and walking.

The EO centers concern for communities impacted by climate change with a priority on tribes, communities of color, rural and coastal communities, lower-income households, and communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes that typically have fewer resources for adapting to climate change, and are therefore the most vulnerable to displacement, adverse health effects, job loss, property damage, and other effects of climate change. This priority aligns closely with OHA's adopted health equity core value; our 2020-24 State Health Improvement Plan priorities to address institutional bias, adversity, trauma and toxic stress, economic drivers of health (including issues related to housing, living wage, food security, and transportation), access to equitable preventive

care, and behavioral health (including mental health). It is also consistent with our climate and health work, as discussed below.

### Response to General Directives to Agencies (EO Section 3)

EO 20-04 directs OHA and other agencies to “consider and integrate climate change, climate change impacts, and the state’s GHG emissions reduction goals into their planning, budgets, investments, and policy making decisions.”

OHA established a small [climate and health program](#) in 2010 when it became one among eight initial grantees of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Building Resilience Against Climate Effects program. OHA has leveraged those resources to form partnerships with state agencies, academia, local public health authorities, and community groups to develop this area of public health practice in the state. Key accomplishments include:

- Supporting five local public health authorities in the development and implementation of [local climate and health adaptation plans](#)
- A [2014 Climate and Health Profile Report](#) identifying climate-related health risks to people in Oregon;
- A 2015 [Climate and Health Vulnerability Assessment](#);
- A 2017 [Climate and Health Resilience Plan](#) providing strategies and policy priorities for state, local and tribal public health practitioners and partners to build climate resistance among vulnerable populations;
- A 2018 [Climate and Health Policy Paper](#) prepared for your office detailing the communities most impacted by health risks of climate hazards and co-pollutants of greenhouse gas emissions;
- From 2017-19 co-convening with the Oregon Department of Energy quarterly meetings of nearly two dozen state agencies to promote climate coordination;
- Regular presentations to the Oregon Global Warming Commission and Oregon Environmental Justice Task Force.

When resources have been available through federal grants or interagency agreements, OHA has analyzed proposed climate policies and identified scenarios that maximize health benefits of greenhouse gas reduction.

OHA’s climate-focused priorities at present and going forward include:

- Participation over the past year, along with more than 20 other state agencies, in the Climate Adaptation Framework (CAF) project coordinated by the Department of Land Conservation and Development.
- OHA’s chairing of an equity subcommittee of the CAF interagency group that will produce, in consultation with the Environmental Justice Task Force and community partners, a “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Blueprint” for agencies to use when planning and implementing climate adaptation strategies.

- OHA funding, with support from the Oregon Department of Forestry, a consulting firm to deliver training workshops to CAF agencies over spring and summer 2020 on integrating equity considerations in their climate work.
- Completing implementation of OHA's five-year 2017-2021 Climate and Health Resilience Plan and launching development of a new five-year plan for 2022-2026 that incorporates outcomes, achievements and lessons learned.
- Preparing an OHA's Public Health Division (PHD) Environmental Health Modernization Plan as part of PHD's ongoing public health modernization work. The foundation of that plan specifically elevates climate and equity as two cross-cutting lenses to be applied in developing and implementing environmental health modernization.
- Incorporating climate concerns raised by stakeholders in the State Health Improvement Plan, which we hope to complete by the end of 2020, particularly through strategies related to transportation and housing under the focus on economic drivers of health.
- Hosting by the end of 2020 at least two Regional Climate and Health Equity Workshops to build the capacity of local and tribal health departments and their partners to integrate climate change into public health planning and programming; and publishing at least five Regional Climate and Health Equity Profile Reports by June 30<sup>th</sup> 2021 to assist those departments to integrate climate change data (including projected changes in wildfire danger and water insecurity) and health equity data (including identification of most impacted communities) into local planning and programming.
- Actively engaging in and supporting the new Interagency Workgroup on Impacted Communities that will be established pursuant to the EO, which can productively build on the foundation of the CAF interagency workgroup.

Some of this work has been paused or slowed by our response to the coronavirus pandemic, but they remain actions we intend to complete.

The EO's general directives to agencies also address regulatory actions to reduce GHG emissions which are outside OHA's purview. However, our agency has a long-term interest to assess whether OHA can play a role in reducing GHG emissions from operations it controls, such as the State Hospital, and from the part of the healthcare sector OHA influences.

#### Implementation of OHA-Specific EO Directives (EO Section 11)

EO 20-04 also gives OHA three specific directives, which OHA will implement as follows:

- Health Impacts of Climate Change in Oregon. By September 1, 2020, OHA will deliver an inaugural annual report to the Governor, the Global Warming Commission, and the Environmental Justice Taskforce on the public health impacts

of climate change in Oregon, with particular emphasis on the risks faced by vulnerable communities, including Oregon's Tribes, communities of color, low income communities and rural communities. OHA Public Health Division's Climate and Health Program staff will carry out this work with contracted support to assist in updating data from a 2014 vulnerability assessment.

- Impacts of Climate Change on Youth Depression and Mental Health in Oregon. OHA will study the impacts of climate change on youth depression and mental health in Oregon and deliver a report to the Governor no later than June 30, 2021. The OHA Climate and Health Program will lead development of this report, with support from other OHA programs with expertise in mental health, convene stakeholders to inform report development, and as needed contract external expertise.
- Protection of Workers from Exposure to Wildfire Smoke and Excessive Heat. OHA will partner with the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration to develop by June 30, 2021 a proposal for standards to protect workers from exposure to wildfire smoke and excessive heat. We anticipate this work will include convening stakeholders and experts to inform development of the proposal. The OHA Public Health Division's Occupational Health and Climate and Health Programs will lead OHA's work under this task.

OHA's work to identify and build capacity of the public health system to respond to the health threats posed by climate change is an important part of a comprehensive approach to this challenge in Oregon. OHA appreciates the opportunity the EO provides for effective collaboration among state agencies, and in turn with tribal, local, and federal agencies and community partners to advance this work.

Sincerely,



Patrick M. Allen  
Director