

Oregon Housing and Community Services

Poverty Report 2017

Executive Summary

There is plenty of reason for optimism when looking at economic data for Oregon over the past few years. In 2015, median household income increased for the first time since the Great Recession, and job growth has been steady in the majority of Oregon counties. Many rural areas are also beginning to see economic improvement after having a notably slower start to recovery than metropolitan areas (Oregon Office of Economic Analysis). These trends are not unique to our state: nationwide, it appears many economic indicators have improved to approach or even surpass pre-recession levels.

While this is all good news, it does not apply evenly across the population. Recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) shows that 16.5% of Oregonians are living with household incomes below the poverty threshold, still a much higher rate than the 12.9% shown in 2007 before the financial crisis hit. Furthermore, rents have been increasing significantly all across the state, far outpacing the recent growth in household income. As a result, more than half of Oregon renters are paying more than 30% of their gross income toward their housing costs, making it difficult to balance with savings and other living expenses.

This report provides the most recent data available from the Census Bureau on poverty rates and the characteristics of those living in poverty in every county in Oregon. Data for the state and country as a whole are also provided for context.

The data presented here show that even in the midst of a strengthening economy, the poverty rate in Oregon (16.5%) remains above the national poverty rate (15.5%). In 2015 there were approximately 637,000 Oregonians living below the poverty line; this was roughly 121,000 more people than in 2010. The hardest hit counties include Benton, Jefferson, Josephine, Lane, Malheur, and Sherman, which all face poverty rates over 20%.

Children are especially vulnerable to the consequences of poverty and continue to be disproportionately represented in the population living in poverty. Children under 18 years of age made up 22% of the total statewide population in 2015, but they made up 29% of the total population living below the poverty line. Furthermore, families with children and single women with children were much more likely to be living in poverty than families overall. Just 11% of all families lived in poverty, compared to 18% of families with children, and 42% of single women with children.

Poverty rates also vary significantly by race and ethnicity throughout Oregon. While the poverty rate among whites was 15.1%, it was much higher for people of color, ranging from 16.1% for Asians up to 33.8% for African Americans.

Average and median household incomes began to rise in 2015 after stagnating for years after the recession, but housing costs, particularly rents, have been increasing rapidly in many markets much more quickly and for a longer period of time. This means that people must spend more of their earnings on the cost of housing, leaving less money left over at the end of the month for other necessities such as food, daycare, transportation, healthcare, or emergency savings. This is an especially difficult situation

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for people living below the poverty line. When a household spends more than 30% of their income on the cost of housing and utilities, they have a housing cost burden. This report highlights data on household incomes and housing cost burdens at various income levels. The median household income in Oregon was \$51,243 in 2015, but this differs greatly for renters and homeowners. The median household income for renters was \$32,513, while the median household income for homeowners was \$67,070.

Approximately 80% of households with incomes at or below 30% of median family income in the state faced a housing cost burden, and nearly 70% are actually considered severely cost burdened because they spend more than half of their income on housing costs.

Households living below the poverty line who are severely cost burdened (spending more than 50% of income on housing costs) are at an increased risk of homelessness. According to the 2017 Point-in-Time count, completed on one night in January, there were 13,953 homeless people in Oregon. Fifty-seven percent of this population was living in unsheltered locations not meant for habitation and the other 43% were living in emergency shelters or transitional housing units.

In addition to data on poverty, household income and homeless counts, this report also provides detail on services provided by the state to assist those living in poverty. Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) funded the construction or preservation of 2,556 affordable housing units in 2015, a more than 35% increase from the number of units created in 2014. Additionally, nearly 78,000 households received assistance for home heating costs, 46,600 households were able to prevent their services from being disconnected in their home, and more than 5,000 had service restored in their home because of energy assistance from OHCS. Finally, in 2016-17, 49.3% of Oregon students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, 20.5% of all Oregonians received Food Stamps, and 2.8% received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

It is clear from data and research, as well as from the stories of service providers and families struggling to end the cycle of poverty, that these anti-poverty programs are critical to stabilizing people and getting them back on their feet. This report is intended to provide policymakers, advocates, and the public with the information they need to understand poverty in their communities and work together to find ways to both support existing efforts to end poverty and develop new and innovative strategies for ensuring that no one suffers through hunger, homelessness or the stress of living in poverty.

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How to Use This Report

This report provides readers with the most current information available from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2011-2015) on poverty rates, the characteristics of people living in poverty, and household incomes. Recent data regarding services provided by OHCS and Oregon's Department of Human Services are also included. Finally, the report contains 2017 data on the number of homeless people and households in the state. All information is provided at the national, state, and county levels. In addition to all of these data points, the contact information and website for the Community Action Agency in each county is included.

You can use the information in this report to:

1. **Communicate:** cite and use the poverty statistics of each Oregon County for grant applications, talking points, reports, presentations and fundraisers.
2. **Plan:** Determine the areas of highest need by county or statewide as a starting point for developing plans and policies to reduce poverty.
3. **Analyze:** Use the year-to-year comparisons to analyze the progress of area programs, then modify, and expand the use of programs with the best results.

The report contains the following sections:

Executive Summary

The Executive Summary includes the main findings from the report, with a focus on the statewide statistics, to provide an overview of poverty trends in Oregon.

Fact Sheets

There are two fact sheets that explain the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program and demonstrate how anti-poverty programs can – and do – lift people out of poverty. Share this information to show the effects of Community Action Agencies and government programs.

1. Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) – an overview of this important funding source and the services that it makes possible.
2. Community Action Agency Success Stories – client stories from three Community Action Agencies illustrating how funds were used to raise Oregonians out of poverty.

State and County Profiles

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This is where you will find all the data on poverty, income, unemployment, and homelessness, as well as data on the services provided to alleviate poverty. Each county profile includes some state and national statistics to allow for comparisons to be made. The state profile also includes the 2015 federal poverty guidelines for each family size.

Fair Market Rents

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development releases Fair Market Rents (FMRs) each year to provide estimates of the cost of rent and utilities for modest apartments of various bedroom sizes in every county across the country. The FMRs for Oregon are presented here.

Data Sources

This is where you can go to learn where each statistic in the state and county profiles comes from. Links to the sources are provided, when available.

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)

The CSBG program is a federal anti-poverty program administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. CSBG funds provide assistance to local communities, working through a network of Community Action Agencies (CAAs) and other neighborhood organizations, for the reduction of poverty, the revitalization of low-income communities, and the empowerment of low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient.

The CSBG Program in Oregon funds a portion of the administrative and programmatic activities of CAAs. These organizations typically coordinate and administer a variety of services to assist low-income Oregonians within their own communities, in both rural and urban areas of Oregon, and serve as key partners to Oregon Housing and Community Services.

Beneficiaries of CSBG-supported programs are low-income individuals and families (at or below 125% of the federal poverty level) who receive services and activities addressing:

- o Employment
- o Healthcare
- o Education
- o Emergency services
- o Self-sufficiency
- o Youth-based initiatives
- o Housing
- o Elderly-based initiatives
- o Nutrition

CSBG goals nationally include:

- o Helping low-income people become more self-sufficient
- o Improving conditions for low-income households
- o Helping low-income people own a stake in their communities
- o Coordinating local services and providers assisting low-income households
- o Helping to increase Community Action Agencies' ability to achieve results
- o Helping low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening families and creating supportive environments.

Success Stories from Community Action Agencies

Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc.

STORY #1 After fleeing an abusive marriage, “Sandra,” 58, was homeless and living in a domestic violence shelter. She had found refuge at the domestic violence agency and had begun the process of recovering from emotional and physical abuse. But in order to continue to move forward toward self-sufficiency, Sandra needed additional assistance.

That’s when our community partner, the domestic violence agency, contacted Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc. and introduced us to Sandra. We were able to provide her assistance in several ways. First, we worked on securing stable housing so that Sandra could transition from the shelter into her own place. We used funds from our Continuum of Care grant to pay her first- and last-month’s rent and provided six months of rental assistance. Then we helped keep her new home warm by providing heating assistance through our Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Additionally, Community Connection provided resources to help Sandra apply for much-needed medical coverage. We also provided Sandra’s transportation to her medical appointments. Providing her these wrap-around services gave Sandra the foundation to not only continue in her progress of healing, but also to work towards becoming self-sufficient.

But our assistance didn’t stop there. Once a month for six months a Community Connection case manager worked with Sandra to help her set goals. She has successfully met all of her goals, including finding regular employment. She cleans rooms for a local motel.

As she moves forward, Sandra continues to find support through the domestic violence agency, her physicians and her mental health provider. This supportive network has allowed her not only to thrive—but also to give back to her community by volunteering weekly at a local nonprofit organization. Now she has been enrolled in HUD housing, and her housing future is secure. She will not have to worry about becoming homeless.

Sandra’s case worker said: “It has been almost a year, and to see all of the goals she has set and met is not only rewarding for her, but also for me. I know she could not have done this without the funding from a federal homeless grant. Sandra’s goals for the next year are to become financially self-sufficient, and with a little more time, I believe she will continue to accomplish the goals she has set for herself.”

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STORY #2 Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc. sent a weatherization auditor to test the oil furnace in a senior woman's 1920s-era home in Enterprise, Oregon but the furnace would not start. To troubleshoot the problem, we sent a furnace contractor, who discovered that "Jan's" furnace had a cracked heat exchanger. It was leaking exhaust gas into her home.

Then Jan, 69, mentioned she had been sick for months, but didn't know why. It turns out that her symptoms were consistent with carbon monoxide poisoning. After we replaced her broken furnace with a new one, Jan began feeling healthy and energetic again. We also installed a carbon monoxide alarm, which will detect issues if they occur.

Additionally, Community Connection also provided Jan heating assistance through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and air sealing, ventilation repairs and some new windows through the Weatherization Assistance Program.

It was gratifying when Jan called to thank us for her new furnace and for "saving her life."

STORY #3 Over the winter a woman and her significant other moved into Union County. But this woman's life was turned upside down when she discovered her boyfriend had a warrant for his arrest and he was jailed. Suddenly she found herself alone in a new town with no family or friends, no connections, no place to live, and no job. Despite the severe winter weather and low temperatures, she saved money by sleeping in her car while she looked for work. This determined woman found a job working at a manufacturing business in La Grande, but it would be a few weeks before she would collect her first paycheck and she could afford an apartment. Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc. used state homeless funds to put her up in a motel for two nights so that she could begin her new job with a truly fresh start. Using that same perseverance, she found a studio apartment within a week, and Community Connection paid her first month's rent and deposit using federal homeless funds. Landlords in Union County often require tenants to have a job that pays at least three times the amount of rent. This woman's diligence at finding a job helped her secure an affordable apartment. Thanks to her own hard work and with help from Community Connection of Northeast Oregon, Inc., she is no longer homeless and has started a promising new chapter in La Grande.

NeighborImpact

STORY #1: At 82, Marion is enjoying life once again! She purchased her 1912 fixer upper in 1993 and remodeled it. At just 640 square feet, she called it her mini mansion! However, 20+ years later she realized that her home lacked the insulation and heating system necessary to keep her warm and healthy throughout the winter months. As she saw her heating bills rising, she knew she needed help.

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"I received a note in the mail from NeighborImpact to attend a meeting on saving energy and I said, "Why not?" said Marion. "During the meeting, I learned about the Weatherization program. It took a year on the waiting list, but when it happened, it happened quickly."

Marion qualified for a home energy audit and was enrolled in the Weatherization program. Mike Waitt and Judy Swendsen performed the audit and determined that a ductless heat pump would provide a substantial energy savings for Marion's home. Using project data and REM-Design energy modeling software, estimated savings of over \$500 per year are projected – a reduction of 55% for this home's heating bill. Work crews were dispatched and the work was completed within a few weeks.

"Mike and Judy take such good care of you. I'm so thankful," explains Marion. "I tell everybody that NeighborImpact really looks out for you! I feel like I really do live in a mansion now!"

When Marion is not tooling around in her garden or sitting in her rocking chair in her living room, she goes to luncheons and spreads the word about NeighborImpact. "I tell everybody. I go to luncheons where I stand up and say, "Thank you, NeighborImpact and thank you taxpayers!" and my friends say, "Oh God, NeighborImpact is taking such good care of you. They're really looking out for you. Maybe one day I'll call NeighborImpact too."

STORY #2 Young love is what brought Eric and Cherrie Schwartz to Central Oregon in 1971. A love of family, fresh air, and their charming log home is what kept them here. So, when the couple's heating system failed last spring, they were worried sick about how to afford a new one. Would they have to take out a second mortgage? Would they lose their home? Would the stress take a further toll on Eric's health?

For years their primary source of heat was a wood stove and Eric chopped wood during the summer and fall. But after Eric's stroke in 2013, the couple had to rely on their old furnace that, after thousands of dollars-worth of repairs, limped along until April of this year. That was right about the time when Eric and Cherrie discovered NeighborImpact's Weatherization Program.

"We received energy assistance for a few years after Eric's stroke so we knew about NeighborImpact," says Cherrie. "Then, when we attended an Energy Education workshop at the NeighborImpact office, we found out about your furnace replacement and Weatherization programs and knew right away we needed to learn more."

They inquired about the program and soon found that they qualified for home weatherization and a full heat system replacement. Over the period of a few months, NeighborImpact Weatherization and Energy Assistance crews collaborated to add generous amounts of fiberglass insulation, install weather stripping, and replace the furnace with a new system.

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Now the Cherrie and Eric are prepared for a warm and comfortable winter in the home they love and will be celebrating 45 years of marriage in October.

“We can now sleep well at night knowing that we are safe and that we will have a warm place to be this winter,” says Eric. “This program has given us peace of mind, reduced our stress, and we now have a calmer existence.”

“We raised four children in this home and we never ever want to leave,” says Cherrie.

“And thanks to NeighborImpact, we don’t have to,” adds Eric.

Clackamas County Social Services

The 2017 Homeless Count identified 526 people in Clackamas County who are living unsheltered, meaning they sleep on the street, in a car, or in another location not meant for human habitation. Clackamas County Social Services received one time funding from the State to help address the homeless crisis. Some of these funds were used to support shower and hygiene services for those experiencing houselessness.

Clackamas County allocated \$30,000 of these funds to two providers of day services to those experiencing homelessness in order to expand their capacity to offer hot showers to people living on the street. Showers help those experiencing homelessness in many ways. There are emotional benefits (don’t we all feel better after a nice hot shower, especially when sleeping outdoors), physical benefits (many health conditions are exacerbated if a person cannot keep clean) and economic benefits (first impressions are important). As we’ve seen at the Clackamas Service Center, a shower can also build community.

The Clackamas Service Center is one of the agencies that received these funds. Funds were used for supplies, maintenance, staff time, and laundry costs. These funds were especially helpful in January when the extremely cold weather froze the pipes. The Service Center was able to repair the damage, and make improvements to prevent this from happening again. Since July of 2016, 2,343 showers have been offered at the Service Center.

There are many examples of how this service improved the lives of those living on the street.

One client accesses the showers almost every Tuesday and Thursday mornings. He and lives in a camper without water and comes to the Center early to assist with shower setup. Easy access to a shower and laundry facilities has helped him keep his physical health up after a serious illness last year. He also feels that the showers helped to reduce symptoms of his depression, both in the act of getting the shower and the work he does to help set it up.

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Other clients have shared that the shower has helped them access employment and other services, improved their mental health and confidence, and improved their overall quality of life.

The Center's longest-running volunteer shower monitor, Brenda Miller, has noted that the shower created a cooperative atmosphere among clients, with clients taking active roles in setup and takedown. In some cases, clients have given up their spots in order to let another client who is in greater need access the shower unit.

For those of us fortunate to have a safe place to call home every night, we can take for granted simple things, like keeping yourself clean. Clackamas Count Social Services is proud to support this important work and the long term benefits that something as simple as a shower can provide.

Data Sources

Population change since 2000:

OHCS relies on county population data from the 2000 US Decennial Census and 2011-2015 American Community Survey (Table B01003) for each county and the state.

<http://2010.census.gov/2010census/>

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>

Poverty Rates:

Data for all counties, the state, and the US come from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey table B17001.

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>

Unemployment rates:

2011 through 2016 unemployment rates come from the Oregon Employment Department's local area unemployment statistics for average covered non-farm unemployment rate by county.

www.qualityinfo.org

Poverty Population Characteristics:

Data for all counties, the state, and the US come from the 2011-15 American Community Survey tables B17001 A-I, B17010, and B17016.

www.census.gov/acs/www/

Services Provided Table:

- **Units funded with OHCS resources:** this number represents the number of affordable housing units in the county for the specified calendar year that were supported by funding allocated by OHCS. The amounts do not represent rolling totals; the number reflects units funded for the specified year only.

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These could represent units being renovated or under construction. The data come from the OHCS Department Information System for Housing (DISH), based on the funding approval date.

- **OHCS funding for affordable housing:** this number represents the funds allocated by OHCS to projects in each county in the specified calendar year based on funding approval date. It represents funding from several programs at OHCS implemented to help moderate- to low-income families by developing, financing and preserving locally supported affordable housing. These fund awards can apply to predevelopment, new construction and renovation activities. If there is a dollar amount and no new units in a given year, the specified funding supported predevelopment or non-housing investments (such as community rooms or public facilities). The data come from the OHCS Department Information System for Housing (DISH).

Households receiving energy assistance-#: this number represents the number of households who received assistance for home heating costs for the specified calendar year. Energy assistance represents two programs: the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) and Oregon Energy Assistance Program (OEAP). Some households receive assistance from both LIEAP and OEAP. This data represents an unduplicated count within the county as well as for the state. State totals may not match the county sum of households receiving assistance as some households may have received services in multiple counties. The data come from the OHCS OPUS system for all counties except for Clackamas, Lane, Multnomah and Washington counties where the local jurisdiction's energy and weatherization programs submit data to OHCS energy program staff.

- **Disconnects Prevented-#:** this number represents the number of households receiving energy assistance that were able to avoid having services disconnected from their homes. The data come from the OHCS OPUS system for all counties except for Clackamas, Lane, Multnomah and Washington counties where the local jurisdiction's energy and weatherization programs submit data to OHCS energy program staff.

- **Restored Utility-#:** this number represents the number of households receiving energy assistance that were able to restore utility services to their homes. The data come from the OHCS OPUS system for all counties except for Clackamas, Lane, Multnomah and Washington counties where the local jurisdiction's energy and weatherization programs submit data to OHCS energy program staff.

- **Household income for energy assist avg-#:** this number represents the average household income of those receiving energy assistance. The county figures are actual averages and the statewide figure is derived from weighted averages of county level data. The data come from the OHCS OPUS system for all counties except for Clackamas, Lane, Multnomah and Washington counties where the local jurisdiction's energy and weatherization programs submit data to OHCS energy program staff.

- **Students eligible for free/reduced lunch-#:** this figure represents the number of children within each county that were eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch. In general, students qualify for free or

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reduced-price lunch when the household receives public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or food stamps, or if the household income does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level. The data come from the Oregon Department of Education www.ode.state.or.us/data/reports/toc.aspx#students.

- **Students eligible for free/reduced lunch-%:** this figure represents the number of children within each county that were eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch as a percentage of all enrolled students. In general, students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch when the household receives public assistance, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or food stamps, or if the household income does not exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level. The data come from the Oregon Department of Education www.ode.state.or.us/data/reports/toc.aspx#students.

- **Population receiving Food Stamps-%:** this number represents an unduplicated client count of food stamp recipients as a percentage of the Census population estimate for each year. The data come from DHS program staff.

- **Population receiving TANF-%:** this number represents an unduplicated client count of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families in the year specified as a percentage of the Census population estimate for each year. The data come from DHS program staff.

Household Income and Housing Burden:

Data for all counties, the state, and the US come from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey tables B19113, B25074, and B25095.

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>

Housing burden is defined as spending more than 30 percent of household income on gross housing costs including utilities. According to HUD, extremely low-income households earn 30 percent of median family income, very low-income households earn 50 percent of median family income, and low-income households earn 80 percent of median family income.

Point in Time Homeless Count:

Homeless counts come from the January 2017 Point In Time Homeless Count (PITHC) as reported to OHCS by each of the seven Continuums of Care in Oregon. This is a count done in a single night and includes single individuals and individuals in families receiving shelter and services, those turned away, and those counted on the street.

Consistent with the State of Oregon definition, chronically homeless includes individuals who have been continually homeless for a year or more, or had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years, in addition to having a disability, mental illness or addiction disorder.

Poverty Guidelines (on state page only):

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The US Department of Health and Human Services provides 2015 poverty threshold data by family size.
<https://aspe.hhs.gov/2015-poverty-guidelines>

Fair Market Rents:

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2015 Fair Market Rent data for each county by unit size.
www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/fmr.html