

# COLUMBIA COUNTY

## Board of Commissioners Office

### Commissioners

Margaret Magruder  
Kellie Jo Smith  
Casey Garrett

### Administration

Jacyn Normine  
Kathy Coddington

### Communications

Mark Pacheco



ST. HELENS, OR 97051

230 Strand St., Room 338

Direct (503) 397-4322

Fax (503) 366-7243

columbiacountyor.gov

January 23, 2026

To: Senator Kate Lieber, Co-Chair, and Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair – Joint Committee on Ways and Means

From: Columbia County Public Health Department / Board of Commissioners

Re: 2026 Budget

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez,

Thank you for your commitment to public health over the years. While we understand that you are grappling with how to ensure the continuation of the CCOs and finance the implementation of HR 1, we implore you to maintain the current budgets for public health programs because **public health saves the health system millions each year.**

Columbia County Public Health is committed to saving money and saving lives through substance misuse prevention. Columbia County Public Health has distributed hundreds of doses of the overdose reversal medication, naloxone, to community partners and individuals alike, held dozens of community trainings on naloxone administration, and has hosted comprehensive substance use prevention fairs at schools in every town in Columbia County.

Youth tobacco use is a major concern in Columbia County and the State of Oregon. There has been a major decline in youth cigarette smoking, but vaping, particularly with flavored tobacco products, has increased significantly. According to the 2024 Oregon Student Health Survey, 70% of 11<sup>th</sup> graders in Columbia County reported using a flavored tobacco product or vaping in the last month. It is estimated that 9 in 10 adult smokers began smoking before the age of 18. Columbia County Public Health is working with local middle and high schools to establish vaping policies, aid in student vaping cessation, and expand education about the risks of youth tobacco use.

Environmental health is a cornerstone of any community, ensuring the safety of food and water, and prompt investigation of any foodborne or waterborne disease outbreaks. Additionally, as a county at great risk for environmental hazards such as flooding, wildfires, and other natural disasters, public health emergency preparedness is a necessity in the event of *when* disaster strikes, not *if*, to maintain order, function, and sustain human health and safety during the unthinkable. **These essential activities would not be possible without continued funding and support from the state.**

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Lastly, when healthcare transformation was stood up, it was considered a three-legged stool – and CCOs were only one leg. The other legs were/are public health and early childhood – which do the prevention work necessary to bend the cost curve. While CCOs were fully funded, public health has not been yet. Cutting public health programs will only lead to more problems for you in health care budgeting.

We know you currently have the hardest job in state government and that you will do your best to make decisions that will do the least harm. Thank you for your service, and please remember that **public health saves lives and money.**

Sincerely,

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Kellie Jo Smith, Chair

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Casey Garrett, Commissioner

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Margaret Magruder, Commissioner