

Healthy Homes, Happier People, Stronger Communities

In 2021, the Oregon Legislature initiated a landmark program designed to provide more sustainable housing to low-income families: Through the Healthy Homes Grant Program, Oregon Health Authority has been charged with making grant funds available to third-party organizations which, in turn, provide funds to eligible homeowners and landlords to repair or rehab buildings for suitable, sustainable housing.

Private citizens may not apply directly but are invited to explore options through one of the participating third-party programs such as utility companies, Coordinated Care Organizations, local housing authorities, Community Action Agencies, manufactured dwelling park nonprofit cooperatives, and Indian health centers.

Who might benefit from this program? Although the figures for 2025 have not yet been defined in time for publication of this article last year's formula will carry forward. That means that individuals and families with an income below 80% of the median household income in Portland-Metro, Hillsboro, and Vancouver area are eligible for this help. For example, as of May 2024, the median income for a family of four was \$114,400. So, for a family of four, the eligibility criteria would sit at about \$91,200 gross income. For a single individual, the income requirement would be 80% of \$80,080 or \$64,064 annual income and below. Furthermore, the program would require that the 'housing burden' not be more than 30% of the gross income. For one person, 30% of \$64,064 divided by 12 months would mean that individual would be making rent or mortgage payments of less than \$1,600 per month.

However, those numbers are figured on gross income and, as we all know, gross income does not mean 'spendable income'. The dollars on paper are not the same as dollars in one's purse or pocket! To extrapolate, the actual available income that can be applied to rent may be far less than it appears from these figures.

One might ask about the overall value of such a program. Why would the Oregon initiate the Healthy Homes grant funding? It has been determined that low income, poorly housed or unhoused community members have an impact on a community's ability to be proactive and participate in public processes. Individuals who meet the program's financial criteria tend to be at risk of displacement and have increased health problems that impact economic imbalances in our community.

Thus, it becomes obvious that unhoused or poorly housed community members are more than a blight on our streets and sidewalks! Our low-income neighbors, poorly housed or unhoused, deserve greater consideration for a wide variety of important, impactful elements of *sustainable community living*.

The Healthy Homes Grant Program has a focus on communities with higher concentrations of low-income households, high rent burden, environmental factors like pollution or exposure to

potential negative health effects from that exposure, environmental degradation, and sensitive populations.

So which of these factors are mitigated by the Healthy Homes Grant Program? The goals include extending the life and usefulness of existing residences, maximized energy efficiency and related reduction in utility bills, and the improved health and safety of residents.

The list of possible repairs funded by the grant is long, but it includes radon or lead abatement; fire safety and the use of fire-resistant building materials; structural safety including seismic resiliency; accessibility; removal of serious allergens, mold, mildew, and a system for smoke filtration for better indoor air quality; electrical upgrades to improve safety and energy efficiency; and improvements to deflect extreme heat, including additional landscape elements and trees.

To learn more about who may be eligible and how the funds are distributed, go to this [page](#) or email healthyhomes@odhsoha.oregon.gov.

To be truly civilized, to live in a civil and sustainable community, we must be mindful of those conditions that have an overall impact on our collective humanity, health and safety, economic factors, and the 'beauty' of our community that shines from the inside outward.

~ **Nancy Doty** (ndoty@villagesnw.org)