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Financial hardship endures despite rebounds in job growth

Latest Oregon by the Numbers report reveals concerning trends for the wealth and opportunity of individuals, families and economies

ROSEBURG, Ore. – The latest data captured in [Oregon by the Numbers 2023](#) reveals that, while job growth is rebounding post-pandemic in nearly every county, the portion of households in financial hardship remains mired statewide at 44 percent. Many of these households are headed by working adults who earn too much to qualify for many safety net programs, but not enough to cover basic needs like rent, transportation and child care. Across rural and urban counties, Oregonians are struggling to save or build wealth because they do not earn enough to survive financially in our modern economy.

“It feels counterintuitive, but the reality is that jobs are on the rise and people are employed but *still* unable to keep up with the accelerating cost of living,” said Kasi Allen, the director of learning and knowledge management for The Ford Family Foundation. “This demands the attention of policymakers — and necessitates a statewide commitment to ensuring that all working Oregonians have living wage jobs.”

Released annually by The Ford Family Foundation and Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service, [Oregon by the Numbers](#) maps the unique realities of all 36 counties in ways that community decision makers can easily use. Its goal is to help all of Oregon see *all* of Oregon.

This year’s data highlight focuses on the U.S. Census Bureau’s decision to update its definition of “rural,” from places with populations of less than 2,500 people to less than 5,000 people. As a result, more than 1,300 small cities and towns across the country that were considered urban in 2010 are now considered rural. An example in Oregon is the town of Lakeview in Lake County. In 2020, it “became” rural by the new definition, even though the town only lost a few hundred residents and the county grew in population. The 2023 edition therefore shows that Lake County, formerly with a rural population of 63 percent, is now 100 percent rural.



“This is what is both unique and enduring about Oregon by the Numbers,” noted Kara Inae Carlisle, president and CEO of the Foundation. “While its county-level profiles show areas of strength and need in real and specific terms, the report also shares high-level trends — at state, regional and national levels — that help us *see together* and better understand the forces shaping daily life and experiences across our state.”

Also noteworthy in the 2023 edition are four new measures that replace previous ones, due to lingering data challenges related to COVID-19 or state agency data collection decisions.

- **Fifth Grade Mathematics** replaced **Kindergarten Ready (Letter Sounds)**. The Oregon Department of Education has discontinued its Kindergarten Readiness assessment. As the agency and its education partners seek a meaningful replacement, the percentage of fifth graders who meet or exceed required mathematics scores on state standardized tests replaces it. This measure helps raise awareness about how Oregon’s educational systems struggle to give young people the supports and learning experiences they need to succeed in math — a known gatekeeper to college and career.
- **Good or Better Health** replaced **Good Physical Health**. Based on a recently modified self-assessment survey conducted by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA), this measure now reflects respondents’ rating of the quality of their health rather than estimates the number of days of good health over the past month.
- **Mental Health Providers** replaced **Good Mental Health**. OHA similarly updated their data analysis practices for Good Mental Health. In its place, the report now examines data reflecting the number of people in a county per mental health provider.
- **Electric Vehicle Charging** replaced **Transit Service**. Due to ongoing data consistency and interpretation challenges surrounding the Transit Service measure, this year’s report features a measure showing the number of charging stations for electric vehicles in each Oregon county.

The 2023 report PDF may be viewed and downloaded at tfff.org/obtn. The next printed edition of Oregon by the Numbers will be available in 2024.

About The Ford Family Foundation

The Ford Family Foundation believes in the power of rural communities. It is a private, nonprofit foundation proudly headquartered in Roseburg, Oregon, serving rural Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. Its investments through grants, scholarships and community building create the conditions so that children have the family, educational and community supports they need to succeed in life. www.tfff.org

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