

SPECIAL Director's Message



Oregon Housing and Community Services

February 25, 2021

Dear Partners,

2020 was a year unlike any other! As we continue to move the work in 2021, I want to take a moment to highlight how transformative our impact is. I'm reflecting back upon work we collectively accomplished and wanted to take a moment to share 2020 by the numbers:

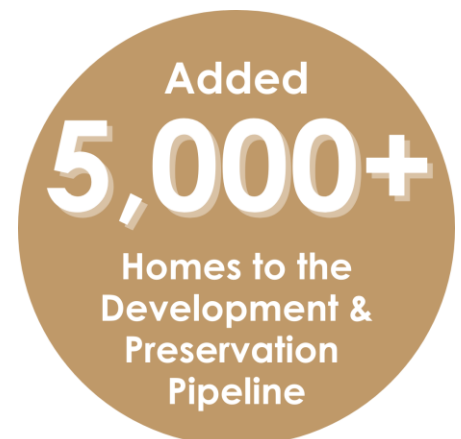
Leading with Equity and Racial Justice:

OHCS took proactive steps to advance our bold equity and racial justice goals. For the first time, we made available millions of dollars in funding to culturally specific organizations, (in Special COVID Emergency Solutions Grant funding.) We took proactive steps to develop more inclusive strategies (such as Minority, Women and Emerging Small Business contracting and created new Tribal set asides in our 9% Low Income Federal Tax Credit program.) We supported intersectional partnerships with other agencies including the Oregon Health Authority with funding to support [over 100 community based and culturally specific organizations](#). As we move forward with intention we appreciate ideas, partnership and feedback to continue centering and advancing this work.



Partnering to Build Affordable Housing:

In 2020, OHCS added more than 5,000 homes to our development pipeline (funding commitments for 2,874 homes to our pipeline and closing on 41 transactions that will produce an additional 2,785 homes.) These investments help address Oregon's severe housing shortage while ensuring thousands of additional Oregon families will have a safe, stable place to call home. This number puts us at 15,863 homes of our [Statewide Housing Plan](#) target of building a development pipeline of 25,000 homes within five years!





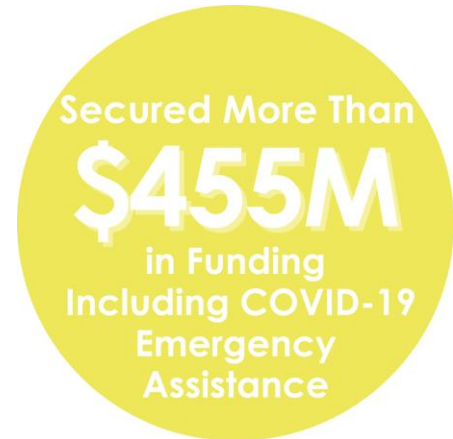
Wildfire Disaster Housing Response and Recovery:

In September OHCS raced into action convening the [Wildfire Disaster Housing Task Force](#) to respond to the needs of Oregon wildfire survivors. Our [Wildfire Damage Housing Relief Fund](#) provided information and support to impacted Oregonians and we are continuing to process more than 600 applications from all eight wildfire impacted counties. As of early January, [OHCS has provided financial assistance to 279 qualifying households](#) who lost housing due to Oregon wildfires with a focus on Oregonians ineligible or unable to receive FEMA Assistance. OHCS is connecting with community partners to get the word out about this program.



Legislative Advocacy:

The Statewide Housing Plan centered our work in advocating for resources for housing stability. In 2020, we testified and frequently engaged with legislative leadership in four legislative sessions, 12 emergency board sessions, and countless committee meetings. OHCS and housing advocates secured a record level of funding, more than \$455,000,000 to assist Oregonians. We advanced new concepts to increase housing options and provide support to Oregonians in need, worked to expand access and improve policies to create a more inclusive Oregon. OHCS acted swiftly in partnership with the Governor's office and state and federal leaders to advocate for federal resources to help Oregonians impacted by COVID-19, economic uncertainty, and the 2020 Oregon Wildfires. We did all of this while preparing for the largest legislative agenda in agency history outlined in the [2021 Legislative Agenda](#).



Community and Stakeholder Engagement:

Even though we couldn't be together, our partners gathered with us online to build community and advance shared goals. Together we continued to take part in, groundbreakings, conferences, town halls and hosted well over 100+ partner calls, webinars and events including our first annual [virtual Veteran's Convening](#) with 110 participants in partnership with the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs. The [Oregon Housing Stability Council](#) welcomed new [members](#) and [met monthly to provide leadership](#), receive community feedback and set policy for the development and financing of affordable housing throughout Oregon.





Energy and Weatherization:

Last year our energy and weatherization team worked closely with Community Action Agencies to avoid utility shut offs ensuring nearly 150,000 struggling Oregonians kept their lights on. In 2020 the Oregon Multifamily Energy Program (OR-MEP) worked with affordable rental properties across the state to adopt efficiency improvements including reducing energy use and heating costs for nearly 2,500 new and existing affordable rental homes. This is a win-win: our weatherization programs reduced energy costs, improved health and comfort for residents while doing our part to mitigate climate change impacts.



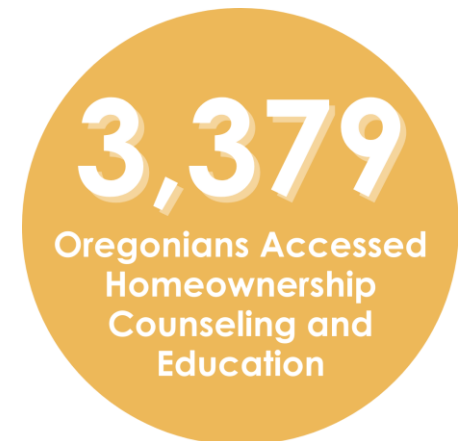
Building Permanent Supportive Housing:

With 586 homes funded we're more than halfway to reaching our 5-year target of 1000 additional homes. Recognizing the urgent need to provide supportive housing to home individuals and families that have been chronically homeless, in 2020 we allocated a little more than \$37 million of the \$50 million in capital funds to eight projects that attended our first Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Institute put on by the Corporation for Supportive Housing. These eight developments will create 498 new homes including 206 permanent supportive homes. We're also building capacity to continue this work: our second PSH Institute launched in 2020. Today a second cohort of eight new teams are tackling ways to reduce barriers to housing stability in their local communities.



Providing Keys to Homeownership:

With the help of approved Housing Counselors more than 3,000 individuals received homeownership counseling and education to purchase a home and remove barriers to financing. More than 500 new homebuyers saved money with below market interest rates thanks to the Oregon Bond Residential Loan Program in 2020. Together our programs expanded access to homeownership and assisted nearly 1,000 Oregonians purchase and receive keys to their first home! In addition to assisting current and first time homeowners, we're also working to ensure Oregonians stay in their homes when hard times hit with targeted outreach to communities of color and historically marginalized groups. In 2020, the Oregon Homeownership Stabilization Initiative provided mortgage support to 536 new program participants, spending \$18,040,101 in targeted assistance to homeowners struggling to make their mortgage payments. (To date, the program has served over 17,000 Oregonians and disbursed \$307,608,099 in funding.)





Responding to Oregonians in Need:

Our housing info line alone returned over 200 calls to Oregonians seeking information. We hosted 27 [Oregon Statewide Response and Recovery Unhoused Network](#) calls to address emerging COVID-19 concerns and hosted trainings focused on skill building topics such as trauma informed care. We also created new partnerships with the Oregon Health Authority, the Oregon Law Center and other community groups to ensure our outreach was responsive, intersectional and provides wrap around services that extend beyond housing.



Keeping Oregonians Housed:

In working to prevent and reduce statewide poverty and homelessness, OHCS Housing Stabilization Division set new records in distributing assistance to local communities to help Oregonians in need. As of December, approximately 13,813 households had received help paying rent with OHCS administered funds distributed by Community Action Agencies and community-based organizations across the state during the 2020 calendar year. During the pandemic alone, the federal funds provided by the Coronavirus Relief Fund totaled approximately \$63.5 million in rent payments made to Oregonians across the state. During a global pandemic this funding provided a life line to those in need.



Tailoring Programs to Meet the Needs of Rural OR:

OHCS allocated \$114 million in Local Innovation Fast Track (LIFT) Rental funds, in addition to leveraging tax-exempt conduit bonds, and Federal 4% Low Income Housing Tax Credits issued by OHCS, to create 1,574 new affordable homes serving communities of color and rural communities. In order to help rural partners respond to the pandemic, we also provided capacity building funds to smaller rural partners to assist them in being able to operate their projects remotely. We understood the incredible need for increased funds to develop agricultural workforce housing and are updating the Agricultural Workforce Housing Tax Credit to reflect the need. We engaged with Oregon Human Development Corporation and other stakeholders to ensure our services address the needs of agricultural communities across the state.





Ensuring Oregonians Have Safe Shelter:

OHCS distributed approximately \$12 million total in “Out of the Cold” funds to ensure Oregonians experiencing homelessness have a safe, dry place to come in from the cold. We also responded to new pandemic challenges by supporting shelters in providing services following recommended socially distant “non-congregate” ways to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among some of Oregon’s most vulnerable populations.



OHCS does so many things to be proud of and this work represents only a small snippet of what we did in 2020. Internally we advanced our Equity and Racial Justice work with a diverse and committed Housing Stability Council and with a new leadership position in the OHCS Executive team. Because this work takes all of us, in 2020, we stood up five newly established Equity Committees to prioritize and center this work across the agency.

As we pause to celebrate impactful work, I want to take a moment to appreciate the staff that make it happen. A great deal of the work at OHCS happens behind the scenes. Internally our Human Resources, Facilities, Business Services and Information Technology sections worked under extraordinarily short timelines to ensure 172 or 88% of all employees had the support they needed to do this important work from home in order to comply with guidelines to limit the spread of COVID-19. They continue to add support structures and equipment to allow more employees to work remotely. The IT department alone responded to 2,337 helpdesk requests in 2020 which is a threefold increase from the previous year. Phew!

Through all the challenging ups and downs of this last year I've never seen OHCS staff work harder. I am continually humbled to see OHCS employees show up in service to fellow Oregonians despite navigating health, housing, racial injustice and evacuation challenges of their own. More important than the [awards won this past year](#) or the successful initiatives launched, we accomplished a great deal together in partnership to improve the lives of our neighbors.

They say home is where the heart is – today thousands of additional Oregonians have a safe, dry place for their heart to call home in part because of the work of OHCS and our partners this past year. I'm humbled to carry out this work alongside you. Thank you for all you do.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MSL".

Margaret Salazar
Executive Director

