

Community Name and State: Klamath County, Oregon

Phase I Applicant ID #: 65184

1. Introduction to the community, including key community demographics, characteristics, strengths, and challenges, and how the community's health improvement journey began and what catalyzed collective action.
2. Four accomplishments—specific policies, programs, or strategies—that best reflect your community's response to identified needs and progress toward better health.

There is a saying that “a rising tide lifts all boats”. At a glance, Klamath County, Oregon is rough around the edges, blighted, and impoverished, but when you look a little closer it is a lovely place full of close-knit, committed community members. Klamath County is a beautiful, rural community set in the high desert of southern Oregon. Klamath County is named for the Klamath Native American Tribes, who have inhabited the Upper Klamath River Basin region for thousands of years. Geographically, Klamath County is the fourth largest county in Oregon but is home to only 66,443 people. Klamath Falls is the largest city in Klamath County with approximately 21,500 people and an equally large suburban population. Together they comprise the urban growth boundary, much of which falls under Klamath County jurisdiction. Klamath Falls is an integral part of Klamath County as it serves as the central hub of activities and services for most county residents, and also houses the county seat.

Klamath County's population is comprised of predominantly White (78.3%) individuals, but our county continues to grow in diversity with 12.5% Hispanic and Latino, 4.9% Native American, and 4.1% mixed race individuals. Historically Klamath County developed into a timber and agricultural community, however the timber industry died out and the economy crashed as a result. When the economy crashed, jobs became scarce, poverty increased and health outcomes plummeted. Klamath County continues to have a high rate of economically disadvantaged residents with 14.2% of families and 19.3% of individuals living below the federal poverty level. In fact, 63.9% of students in the Klamath County School District qualify for free and reduced lunch. The geographic spread of the county presents a range of barriers to accessing necessary health and human services, especially for those with limited means and mobility.

Additionally, for the past several years Klamath County has ranked at the bottom of the RWJF County Health Rankings. One in every two Klamath County adults suffers from a chronic condition. Health professionals recognized Klamath County was in dire straits and knew the community had to mobilize, but needed a place to start and a platform for change. With strong leadership and a groundswell of momentum, the Healthy Klamath Coalition was formed in 2012. This multi-sector partnership of dedicated community members, leaders, and local organizations came together to build a healthier community and “raise the tide” of Klamath County. To gather baseline data, Healthy Klamath conducted its first in-depth community health assessment in 2013.

Through key informant interviews and quantitative data collection, we found that our rural location, lack of transportation, low socioeconomic status, high rates of substance abuse, lack of access to nutritious foods, lack of law enforcement presence, and limited access to health care services contribute to our low health rankings. Also, Klamath County is designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration as a Health Professional Shortage Area for physical and mental health. As a community, we knew we had nowhere else to go but up and we embraced the challenge. The chronic lack of providers necessitates the need for community programming to improve health through prevention and health promotion to reserve physicians for the truly sick. In addition to placing a strong emphasis on health improvement, we have begun reinventing ourselves through recreation, tourism, military, and renewable energy, while our agricultural roots remain intact. We are resurrecting a town that faced tremendous hardship and re-creating it so that everyone, not just the affluent, have the opportunity to thrive and achieve optimal health and well-being.

Now four years later, Healthy Klamath is the common thread, acting as the umbrella organization for health improvement and a second community health assessment has since been completed. The collective impact of this coalition has increased social capital and expanded the scope of influence throughout Klamath County. Healthy Klamath members are involved in a wide variety of community initiatives to improve health, including the following accomplishments. Creating strong partnerships in

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our rural community has offered a level of familiarity for residents to have a trusted community “insider” to foster optimism and openness for change, and is helping restore pride in our community.

Healthy Klamath coalition members spearheaded our most recent, and perhaps most impactful accomplishment, the Blue Zones Project (BZP). BZP is a structured, community-wide well-being improvement initiative designed to make healthy choices easier, for everyone. BZP takes a life-radius approach and uses evidence-based best practices and a comprehensive set of tools that encourages schools, worksites, restaurants, grocery stores, city government, and faith-based and civic organizations to change their environments for better health. It also creates opportunities for individuals to articulate purpose, connect with the community, and make positive, personal health behavior changes.

The journey to bring BZP to Klamath Falls started in 2014 when the Oregon Healthiest State Initiative decided to bring the BZP to Oregon. Hoping to be selected as the BZP demonstration community for Oregon, Healthy Klamath leadership coordinated a group of 27 community members, with matching Klamath Falls t-shirts, to attend the launch of the Oregon Healthiest State Initiative. Our community members made a splash and demonstrated not only need, but also dedication and enthusiasm.

During the BZP community readiness assessment, hundreds of community members expressed a desire to make Klamath a better place to live, work, and play, and more importantly, a readiness to roll up their sleeves and do the work to make a positive change. The national BZP team described us as people that are resilient, take care of each other, and know how to “make things happen.” Ultimately, we were chosen as the first BZP demonstration community in Oregon! Dr. Glenn Gailis, a well-known and respected physician in town captured the spirit of this opportunity when he said, “In my 40 years as a physician, this is the most exciting thing for health and wellness I have seen in my community!”

More than 140 volunteers throughout Klamath County excitedly joined the five local BZP staff to drive the work in nine community sector committees: Built Environment, Smoking and Tobacco, Food Systems, Worksites, Schools, Restaurants & Grocery Stores, Faith-Based & Civic Organizations, Engagement, and Steering Committee. Through public input, policy workshops, and strategic planning, these committees came together to create the initial community “blueprint” guiding the initiative and moving the project toward implementation. The BZP was implemented in the population center: the City of Klamath Falls and the urban growth boundary in Klamath County.

Although becoming Oregon’s first BZP demonstration community was a huge achievement, the true accomplishment is the amount of policy, systems, and environmental changes that have happened in the first two years of the project. Already our community has met 70% of the BZP metrics in the People, Places, and Policy focus areas to improve the health and well-being of our residents.

Author Malcolm Gladwell speaks about the ‘tipping point’ in order for true change to occur. With this in mind, the goal was to reach at least 15% of the population, or 5,993 people, as measured by: signed personal pledges to incorporate BZP Power 9 Principles in their lives, participation in walking groups to expand their social networks, attending purpose workshops to find and articulate their purpose, and volunteering to give back to the community. In just two years, 4,832 community members have been actively engaged in BZP activities, reaching 81% of our community’s engagement goal!

Furthermore, 22 worksites and schools, 19 faith-based and civic organizations, and 11 restaurants and grocery stores have adopted wellness policies and implemented healthy best practices to become “BZP Approved”. For example, grocery stores have created designated BZP checkout lanes with healthy food and beverage options. They have also created BZP parking spaces further away from the entrance to encourage walking. Restaurants are offering more plant-based options. Worksites have created gardens, provided healthier vending machine options, and posted signs to encourage the use of stairs. Over 7,000 adults and children are being quietly nudged towards healthier choices every day!

BZP understands the importance of strong, lasting change that is often achieved through policy change. A food policy initiative was recently implemented to make SNAP/EBT payments possible at the

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Klamath Falls Farmers Market. SNAP benefits can also be used to purchase food from the newly initiated Virtual Farmers Market, which makes local fruits and vegetables available year-round. Additionally, a smoke-free policy was implemented that added 150 acres of outdoor space. Also, influential testimony from BZP committee members helped pass Tobacco Retail Licensing ordinances in both Klamath County and the City of Klamath Falls. A complete streets policy to ensure active transportation is at the forefront of future infrastructure improvements and a protected bike lane is underway. As you can see, BZP is truly making our community a better place to live, work, learn, and play in a sustainable way.

Reducing food insecurity has always been a priority in our community. The Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank has been a champion in this work for 33 years. Through donations, grants, and collaborations, the Food Bank is now operating completely debt-free, allowing them to focus solely on nourishing the community. With innovative ideas and new partnerships, our food bank has gone beyond its traditional operations of simply stocking food pantries and emergency food boxes, and is changing the culture of healthy food choices for those in need. They have learned to get creative and meet people where they are so everyone has easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Food Bank's Produce Connection program is in its fourth year of operation and has been successful because of the strong support of community partners. The goal was to increase the number of pounds of free, fresh produce distributed to people in need. There are no eligibility requirements and no questions are asked, which gives equal access and alleviates any embarrassment about income status. Since the program's inception, the number of pounds of produce and number of sites has multiplied. In 2014, the Produce Connection started with 65,000 pounds of produce distributed at two sites. By 2016 the program had increased almost tenfold, distributing 600,000 pounds at 14 main sites and 4 sub-sites. Now in its fourth year, 720,000 pounds of produce was distributed at 20 main sites and 10 sub-sites. The sites included a variety of agencies within Klamath Falls and in the outlying towns in Klamath County ranging from medical clinics to a mobile home park. The Produce Connection now has its sights set on a goal of distributing one million pounds of produce in 2018. At this pace, and with the collective effort of the Food Bank's dedicated community partners, we anticipate achieving this goal.

Another example of the Food Bank branching out is their membership on the Child Hunger Coalition of Klamath County, which is hosted by the YMCA and Integral Youth Services. It was this partnership that made Produce Connection distribution possible at the sub-sites. The 10 sub-sites are the locations of the Park & Play program, which serve as summer lunch distribution sites and offer youth enrichment opportunities. The support from the Oregon Food Bank, financial support from our Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) and local hospital system charitable foundation, and enrichment activities provided by the Library, Great Outdoor Alliance, and Oregon Tech contributed to the success of the Produce Connection and the Park & Play program. The work of over 200 volunteers contributing 2,500 hours of their time from May until November for the Produce Connection made it possible for the free, fresh produce to reach 3,000 households.

Although the point of this program was to provide as much fresh produce to as many community members as possible, the Produce Connection program also had some unexpected benefits. The produce was used by 11 agencies to create healthy meals for their clients. Parents introduced new fruits and vegetables to their children without the fear of having wasted money on it. One mom said, "They loved the mushrooms with their broccoli. Now I'm buying both!" Senior citizens canned the produce to prepare for winter months. Neighbors reached out to homebound neighbors to check on them and to bring them fresh produce. Sometimes it can be hard to quantify care and concern for other people, but the Produce Connection program in our community exemplifies what can be accomplished when people and organizations come together for the greater good.

A major shift in the culture of health in Klamath County has been a new focus on education and high school graduation. Research clearly shows that an investment in education can reduce poverty, provide brighter futures, and help people achieve better health outcomes. Beginning in 2013, Klamath Promise

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was established as a part of the Regional Achievement Collaborative (RAC) initiative in Oregon to support both the Klamath County School District (KCSD) and the Klamath Falls City Schools. Klamath Promise is a collaborative partnership focused on increasing high school graduation rates in our community. Since its inception, the Klamath Promise partnership has expanded its focus to include promoting school attendance and reducing chronic absenteeism at all levels, early childhood preparation for kindergarten, and promotion of college and career pathways for high school students. The Klamath Promise partners understand that a four-year degree may not be the right path for every student, therefore, additional options after graduation are also emphasized, including apprenticeships, certificates, and community college. The accomplishment of increased graduation rates in our community can be attributed to the fine work done by Klamath Promise partners.

Klamath Promise is composed of several community stakeholders representing education, government, healthcare, youth-focused non-profit organizations, local businesses, faith-based organizations, and community members from throughout Klamath County. The members serve on the steering committee and the following subcommittees: community outreach, student outreach, early learning hub, and career pathways. Since 2016, the Klamath Promise partners have organized two major events each year. Graduation Motivation, held at the beginning of the school year, features a nationally known motivational speaker and is designed to encourage high school seniors to persevere through their senior year and to set themselves up for success after graduation. The second event, which is also the signature event of Klamath Promise, is Graduation Sensation. This event is held at the end of the school year to celebrate the achievements of high school seniors as they transition from high school to college or a career. Students travel from both school districts and all corners of the county to participate. The event includes lunch, a parade to showcase the graduates, and a celebration at a local park where scholarship winners are drawn. Large organization sponsorships have made these events possible and local businesses, community organizations, and community members have donated over \$20,000 each year towards scholarships. These scholarships are created to help students who may not be competitive for traditional academic scholarships; however, these students have still worked hard to get to where they are and need the additional support for continued success.

Awareness of the importance of attendance and graduation and its impact on individual health, socioeconomic status, and economic vitality has grown in the community. Klamath Promise knows that “it takes a village” and by mobilizing the whole community, not just educators, it has seen great success. Graduation rates for both of our school districts have increased almost every year since Klamath Promise began its work. From the 2013-2014 school year to the 2015-2016 school year, graduation rates for the Klamath County School District (KCSD) have increased 7% and have surpassed the state average. One high school saw an 11% improvement, obtaining an almost 100% graduation rate this past school year. Our city school district has seen a 3% improvement in chronic absenteeism. KCSD has also seen a decrease since the last year, dropping from 16.4% to 15.3%, which is 4.4% lower than the state average. Moving forward, the goal for the KCSD is to reduce chronic absenteeism to 10% or less. Although there is still room for improvement, large strides have been made and plans for future efforts are underway.

In addition to education, safety is an important social determinant of health. Crime compromises both physical and psychological health, and deters people from participating in healthy outdoor activities and social gatherings. Because of the patchwork layout of the city within the urban growth boundary, the Klamath Falls Police Department (KFPD) plays a vital role in protecting both city and county residents. During focus groups conducted by nursing students, local adolescents expressed safety as a health issue they face when asked about how “place matters”. Only 54% of Klamath County adults reported they “always feel safe and secure”, which is much lower than state and national levels.

KFPD heard the community’s concerns and responded with energy. They hired a new police chief in 2015 and he immediately saw that Klamath was primed for positive change. They implemented a program called iMPACT (Mission Policing through the Analysis of Crime Trends) and police by the motto

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“Policing with Purpose.” The department looks upstream and addresses root causes of crime. The department analyzes data to identify crime patterns and trends in order to strategize policing missions and community projects. For example, mental health issues are prevalent in the community, and historically many mental or behavioral health crises resulted in arrests. KFPD recognized that law enforcement was an inappropriate intervention and would not solve this problem; professional mental health intervention was needed. In response, KFPD partnered with Klamath Basin Behavioral Health (KBBH) to work in tandem with their crisis intervention team. Additionally, KFPD is partnering with Klamath County Community Corrections, Cascade Health Alliance (our county’s CCO), Klamath Tribal Health & Family Services, Sky Lakes Medical Center, and KBBH to open a sobering station so those struggling with drug and alcohol abuse can receive proper services rather than being sent to jail.

KFPD also implemented policies to engage the community and eliminate the perception of crime. For example, data was used to determine the Mills Addition neighborhood had high needs, high crime, and perhaps an even higher perception of crime--things like broken down cars, boarded up windows, and worn down streets. Officers began addressing the “little things” and work to increase voluntary compliance to code violations through education and community partnerships. Instead of tickets, they issue warnings and speak directly with residents to learn more about their concerns. KFPD partnered with the newly formed Mills Neighborhood Association to assist with a major cleanup project.

The KFPD wanted to further integrate itself into the community, so a new practice was implemented requiring the patrol division to contact at least 250 community members and 15 businesses per week. These contacts are simply stopping and talking to people, asking how they are and if there is anything the officer can do to help them. The KFPD has also begun offering “Coffee with a Cop” for community members to get to know their local officers and “Shop with a Cop” for kids to build healthy, trusting relationships with KFPD. This kind of relationship building helps citizens feel safe and at ease while also getting more police presence in neighborhoods, which helps quell crime. Through these new initiatives, we have seen a reduction in person crimes by 25%, property crimes by 12%, and overall crime by 10%, achieving a 10 year low in Klamath Falls! This improvement is felt by not only those in Klamath Falls proper and the urban growth boundary, but it makes it a safer place for the remaining majority of county residents who come to the city to work, shop, and to access services.

Local media support and a strong online presence have played a crucial role in the success of our health improvement endeavors. The Klamath Promise page in the Herald and News, our local newspaper, is a monthly feature that keeps a pulse on local education happenings. Klamath Promise is the only RAC in Oregon to have consistent, ongoing media support for its efforts. The newspaper also produces a quarterly Blue Zones Project magazine insert to inspire the community to make small, daily changes to improve their health. Another powerful asset we have is the Healthy Klamath website, which features our community health assessments and improvement plans, focus group reports, local health indicators, and GIS maps to identify hot spots of health concerns.

It is an exciting time to live and work in Klamath County. The Blue Zones Project metrics, the Produce Connection, increased graduation rates, and improved public safety are just some of the great initiatives in Klamath County that are addressing the contributing factors to poor health. The range of support and involvement from our local government officials, business and non-profit leaders, and community members has been instrumental in moving the needle on our poor health outcomes. We eagerly await the day these changes will be fully reflected in our health statistics. As we journey together to continue promoting a culture of health in Klamath County, Healthy Klamath is proud to be a part of the creation of a healthier place for future generations to live, work, learn, and play. None of it would be possible without the tireless efforts of our dedicated community partners and the support of our community.