

The following Core Principles and Policy Recommendations were created by the 36 Citizen Panelists of the 2020 Oregon Citizen Assembly Pilot on COVID-19 Recovery. The project was a partnership between Healthy Democracy and Oregon's Kitchen Table. Panelists were randomly selected from across the state of Oregon, to reflect a microcosm of the state on age, gender, race/ethnicity, geographic location, political party registration, educational attainment, and voter frequency.

The Principles and Recommendations were written by the Assembly's Citizen Panelists, after reviewing written testimony, hearing from a variety of expert witnesses, and deliberating over seven two-hour sessions. They represent the words of Panelists themselves and have not been edited by staff. Text in italics are notes by staff.

Core Principles

These represent general Principles pertaining to COVID-19 recovery. The Assembly prioritized these as the top factors for decision-makers to consider, from a lengthy list of potential Principles identified by the Assembly.

1. Oregon's response to COVID-19 should be guided by the best available science and research currently available. The policy discussion should stay focused on science. In addition, to the extent possible, Oregon should coordinate policies with neighboring states to promote consistent policies over a broader geographic region.
2. Every person has a right to safe, clean, and livable housing. Without appropriate, secure housing, the fabric of our entire community will feel the drastic effects.
3. Health and economy are closely integrated: we need to prioritize funding and policies that promote healthy people, for example: testing, vaccines, and controlling the spread of infection.
4. All jobs fill a specific need and everything should be done to make sure those jobs continue to exist. Employment and housing go hand in hand. Locally owned small businesses need more help to prevent them from going under and procedures for assistance should be as simple as possible.
5. Essential service workers should get hazard pay. They are determined by the number of hours they have to work to provide the necessary services. These workers include transportation, grocery, medical, food service, child care, and many others that are assisting people during the pandemic.

There are many reasons this is important, one of which is burnout. When one works as hard as one can and knows others are receiving unemployment, it starts to take a toll mentally. Hazard pay would create an incentive for people who are working. They are providing a service that is extremely dangerous and deserves to be compensated. People are working in frightening situations; some people are getting assaulted by customers who disagree with COVID-19 policies. If those workers are not present, where will the customers go?

6. Ensure health and safety for students, teachers, staff and their respective households in the process of engaging all students while acquiring their education. Provide access for all students, but also focus on equity. For example children who need extra help or have special needs may require more resources.

Policy Recommendations

These Recommendations seek to answer a question that was chosen by the Assembly, from among several questions submitted by a bipartisan selection of state legislators. The question the Assembly chose to answer was:

What do you see as relationships between the pandemic and inequalities in social & economic structures – what has been learned about that? With increased interest in racial justice – how important is that? How much do we need change now? When pandemic is done, how important is it to pursue changes in basic systems? Does this point to an imperative to change our basic systems – social, economic, justice, even energy? How does the pandemic affect inequalities and does it actually affect inequalities?

These Recommendations fall under two topic areas, which were also chosen by the Assembly: housing and education.

The Recommendations below received at least two-thirds support from the Assembly at large. (Level of general support for each Recommendation appears in parentheses.)

Housing

Recommendation (79% support)

Provide programs to keep people in safe and secure homes.

- Help those who have become displaced.
- Assist those who have the potential of becoming homeless.
- Ensure that affected people who need funding the most are getting it.
- Ensure that affected people have somewhere to go. Those who have not been affected by the pandemic now have an opportunity to step up to make a difference in their community such as through volunteering or donating. Example: building tiny houses.
- Initiate or continue meal service/deliveries.
- Consider establishing community gardens in places where there are empty lots; these could be spaces to grow food or put people to work.
- Place a moratorium on evictions. Payments should be made directly to landlords to ensure people are not getting evicted and that the help they are receiving is going to housing.
- Prioritize compensation for essential workers who are working through the pandemic in order to ensure that others have what they need.

Education

Recommendation 1 (74% support)

Internet access and technology affects social inequities; making it accessible to all families meets this and our principles.

- Students and parents should receive training on accessing information from the internet. Parents should also be instructed on assisting students in an online learning environment.
- Each county/district should consider accessibility and the utilization of community resources as a part of prioritizing the distribution of subsidies (e.g. church or other community groups offering lunches).

Recommendation 2 (68% support)

Bolster counseling programs to give students a direct channel to counselors by establishing wellness working groups that incorporate guidance counselors, teachers, and representatives from parent teacher organizations. Have benchmarks for the working group that cover these main points and give schools a baseline expectation. Provide resources for children slipping behind, at-risk children, and students with special needs – tutoring or counseling.

- Student meetings possibly once a month.
- Guidelines for teachers to identify students who are struggling in the classroom.
- Implement one monthly activity in small groups (online or in-person).
- Weekly check-ins with students and school representatives to check in on student mental health. The lack of in person bonding and relationships with other students is a concern. Consider establishing small student groups of the same grade and similar interests for activities other than online academic learning in order to create opportunities for social interaction. There may be a way to use school facilities in a limited capacity to provide a safe socialization environment, i.e. using the facilities for dance, art, or other elective activities.

Recommendation 3 (68% support)

School districts along with local governments should come together to create the metrics and safety measures in order to manage social distancing, mask wearing, and safety procedures to keep everyone safe. Parents should have the opportunity to choose an online option as well for families who are high risk.