Regional Strategic Investment Recommendations 2025

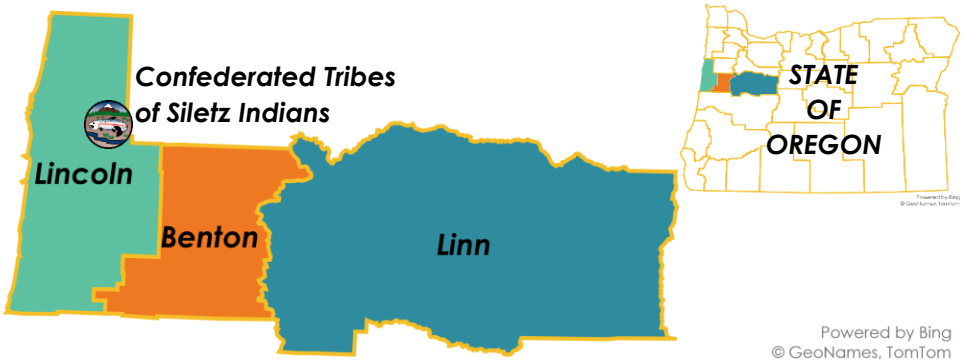
By the Early Learning Hub
of Linn, Benton & Lincoln Counties

Introduction

This report is designed for the EL Hub Governing Board and community partners to guide data-driven strategic investments that align with statewide system goals and the Hub's regional priorities. It builds on the 2025 Regional Data Book, which provides reliable data on the well-being of children and families in Linn, Benton, and Lincoln Counties. As part of Oregon's Early Learning Hub network, the Hub brings together partners from health, education, human services, Tribal nations, and community organizations with a shared vision of creating an equitable, coordinated, and culturally responsive system where every child grows up safe, nurtured, healthy, and ready for school.

Guided by Raise Up Oregon 2024–2028 and the Hub's strategic plan, the 2025 Strategic Investment Recommendations Report synthesizes findings from the data book to identify priority areas for action. It outlines equity-focused strategies to expand early learning opportunities, strengthen school readiness, support family well-being, and reduce disparities linked to race, geography, income, and ability. Serving as a planning tool, the report helps the Governing Board and partners align resources, foster collaboration, and direct investments where they will have the greatest impact for children and families across the region.

Map of Early Learning Hub Region



- *Linn County: located at the eastern edge of the EL Hub region, Linn County extends from the Cascade Range across the valley to the Willamette River. Linn County is the largest of the three counties in our region, both in total area (2,289.5 square miles) and population (129,794).*
- *Benton County: located between Linn and Lincoln counties, Benton County extends into the Coastal Range. Benton County has the smallest total area (675.2 square miles) in our region. The population of Benton County is 96,359.*
- *Lincoln County: to the west, Lincoln County extends along the Pacific Coast. The total area of Lincoln County is 981.0 square miles. The population of Lincoln County (50,632) is the smallest in our region.*

Raise Up Oregon 2024-2028 At-A-Glance

System Goal 1: The early childhood system is equitable: integrated, accessible, inclusive, anti-racist, and family centered.	System Goal 2: All families with young children are supported to ensure their well-being.	System Goal 3: All children are thriving in early childhood and beyond.
Objective 1: Honor and recognize the sovereignty of the nine federally recognized tribal nations within Oregon and ensure strong government-to-government relationships to benefit tribal communities. **Objective 2:** Multi-agency partnerships are developed at the state and local levels to systematically support improved outcomes and streamlined access for all young children and their families. **Objective 3:** Early Learning Hubs are leveraged and resourced to advance regional early childhood systems that are equitable, integrated, accessible, inclusive, and family centered. **Objective 4:** The business, philanthropic, and non-profit communities champion and support the development of the early childhood system.	**Objective 5:** Families with young children are supported in knowing about and accessing a full range of services that meet their needs and are culturally and linguistically responsive. **Objective 6:** Families with young children have increased access to economic supports. **Objective 7:** All families have access to support for their physical, social, emotional, behavioral, and oral health. **Objective 8:** Families have expanded access to culturally and linguistically responsive and specific family preservation strategies, resources, and programs focused on the prenatal-to-five population. **Objective 9:** Affordable housing is available statewide for all families with young children. **Objective 10:** All parents and families are supported and engaged in enabling their children to thrive.	**Objective 11:** Families have access to high-quality, culturally, and linguistically responsive birth-to-five pediatric health care services. **Objective 12:** Families have access to high-quality, culturally, and linguistically responsive birth-to-five social and emotional supports. **Objective 13:** Young children with developmental delays and disabilities are identified early and provided with inclusive services to reach their full potential. **Objective 14:** Families have access to high-quality (culturally responsive, inclusive, developmentally appropriate) and affordable early learning and care that meets their needs. **Objective 15:** The early childhood workforce is diverse, culturally responsive, high quality, and well compensated. **Objective 16:** Children and families experience supportive transitions and continuity of services across early learning and care and public education (K-12) settings.

Please visit the website of Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care for more information about the strategic plan.

Key Challenges and Strategic Investment Recommendations

Linn County

Demographics

Key Challenges:

- The largest number of people and children live in rural areas.
- 22.2% of the total population is children, which is the highest in our region.

Investment Recommendations:

✓ Rural family support services such as childcare, K-12 education, SNAP, TANF, and employment assistance in remote areas, including tribal communities.

Families and Economic Well-Being

Key Challenges:

- Low median household income at $73,396 (vs. statewide average at $80,426).
- Low median family income at $87,508 (vs. statewide average at $98,832).
- High percentage of families with children living below the federal poverty level at 13.1% (vs. statewide average at 11.5%).
- High percentage of families with young children (under 5 years old) living below the federal poverty level at 15.4% (vs. statewide average at 11.1%).
- High percentage of children living in poverty (16.4%) (vs. statewide average at 13.3%).
- The highest number of young children living below the 100% or 200% federal poverty levels.
- High percentage of families with children receiving Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at 27.4% (vs. statewide level at 22.2%).
- A significant percentage of female-headed households with young children (under 5 years old) living in poverty (59.1%) (vs. statewide level at 35.4%).

- A significant percentage of families with incomes less than $75,000 are experiencing cost-burdened housing issues, especially for low-income families.
- Cost-burdened housing issue: the growing challenge of finding affordable housing, whether buying or renting, due to high costs that often exceed incomes.

Investment Recommendations:

- ✓ Invest in expanding access to economic supports such as SNAP, housing assistance, and child care subsidies, especially for low-income and female-headed households.
- ✓ Workforce development programs tailored to rural communities can help boost family income and economic mobility.
- ✓ Mobile outreach and family navigation services are essential to connect isolated rural families with available resources and reduce child poverty rates.
- ✓ Expand local rent assistance and affordable housing partnerships, especially for low-income parents and female-headed households experiencing high poverty rates.

Early Learning & Child Care

Key Challenges:

- Severe child care shortage.
- Lowest preschool enrollment rate at 27.7% (vs. statewide level at 41.5%).
- Only 7 out of every 100 children aged 0-2 have access to childcare slots of any type.
- Only 6 out of every 100 children aged 0-2 have access to regulated childcare slots of any type.
- Only 28 out of every 100 children aged 3-5 have access to childcare slots of any type.
- Only 17 out of every 100 children aged 3-5 have access to regulated childcare slots.
- High child care costs: 18.3% of median household income for toddler care costs in center care.
- Many families cannot afford child care without subsidies, especially those earning minimum wage, since center care costs can take up to 49.3% of a typical monthly household income for toddler care.

- Lowest SPARK (Oregon's quality rating and improvement system for early learning programs) participation rate at 29.1% (vs. statewide level at 33.8%).

Investment Recommendations:

- ✓ Invest in expanding affordable, high-quality child care options by funding the development of new facilities and supporting existing providers, especially in rural areas.
- ✓ Increasing public subsidies and child care assistance for low- and middle-income families is essential to reduce the financial burden, particularly for those earning minimum wage.
- ✓ Targeted investments in infant and toddler care are needed to address the severe shortage of slots for children under age 2.
- ✓ Workforce development and wage supports for early childhood educators can help stabilize and grow the child care workforce.
- ✓ Invest in financial incentives, targeted outreach, and technical assistance to increase SPARK participation among early learning providers, particularly those in rural and underserved areas.
- ✓ Finally, aligning child care expansion efforts with affordable housing initiatives can improve access for families struggling with both care and housing costs.

K–12 Education

Key Challenges:

- Total K-12 student enrollment has decreased in Linn County in the 2023-24 school year compared to 2022-23.
- Several Linn County districts—such as Central Linn SD (27.6%), Scio SD (32.4%), and Sweet Home SD (36.7%)—fall significantly below the statewide average (39.0%) for third-grade ELA proficiency.
- Students from historically underserved student groups (students with disabilities, students in foster care, English learners, children experiencing poverty, and students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or Latinx) show notably low proficiency rates, indicating persistent opportunity gaps.
- Persistent low proficiency and systemic attendance problems highlight a significant education disparity, especially in rural, high-poverty districts.
- High rates of student disabilities: Santiam Canyon SD (21%), Central Linn SD (20%), Sweet Home SD (19%).
- High student mobility: Santiam Canyon SD (37%), Scio SD (31%).
- High poverty rates: Sweet Home SD (47%), Santiam Canyon SD (41%).

- High homelessness: Central Linn SD (10%) vs. state average (4.1%)
- High student–teacher ratios: Santiam SD (30.7), Scio SD (24.4) above state average (21.5)
- ELA and math proficiency declined in 2023–24, with some districts well below state averages.
- Four-year cohort graduation rate drops in some districts (Central Linn).
- Low percentage of experienced teachers: Greater Albany SD has only 36% experienced teachers.
- High student–counselor/psychologist ratios: Central Linn SD (512), Greater Albany SD (329), much higher than other school districts' ratios.
- Low regular attendance rates in some districts: Central Linn SD (62.4%), Sweet Home SD (62.9%).
- High rates of special education in the region, low inclusion of SPED students in regular classrooms, and high dropout rates, along with low graduation rates among students with IEPs in some school districts (Sweet Home SD, Santiam Canyon SD).

Investment Recommendations:

- ✓ Hiring and retaining qualified teachers—especially in early grades—to lower student-to-teacher ratios and improve academic outcomes in reading, math, and science.
- ✓ Expanding early learning transitions, inclusion supports, and attendance outreach will help address chronic absenteeism, homelessness, and the high number of children needing special education services.
- ✓ Stronger coordination between preschool and K–12 systems, along with targeted supports for underserved students, can close early achievement gaps and improve long-term success.
- ✓ Invest in early literacy programs, reading specialists, and culturally responsive supports in low-performing and rural Linn County districts.
- ✓ Expand after-school and summer reading programs while improving preschool-to-K-3 transitions for children facing poverty, disability, or language barriers.
- ✓ A need for targeted investments in early literacy, stable attendance, special supports, and classroom quality across the county to ensure equitable access to educational success.
- ✓ Expand trauma-informed supports and case management in high-poverty and high-mobility districts; expand support for students with mental health issues.

Maternal and Child Health

Key Challenges:

- Highest percentage of young children (under 6 years old) without health insurance at 3.8% (vs. the statewide level at 2.5%).
- Highest percentage of children (under 19 years old) without health insurance at 3.9% (vs. the statewide level at 3.2%)
- Resident births to Hispanic mothers are the second highest in recent years.
- A large percentage of pregnant women not receiving adequate prenatal care at 5.1%.
- The highest rates of newborns with low birth weight or extremely low birth weight.
- High percentage of pregnant women using tobacco at 4.7% (vs. statewide average at 3.5%).
- High Teen Pregnancy Rate at 21.4, higher than the statewide level at 16.9.
- High Teen Birth Rate at 15.5, higher than the statewide level at 9.5.

Investment Recommendations:

- ✓ Expand outreach and enrollment efforts to reduce the number of uninsured young children and youth.
- ✓ Increase access to culturally responsive prenatal care programs, especially for Hispanic mothers.
- ✓ Invest in tobacco cessation programs targeting pregnant women.
- ✓ Enhance support and education programs to reduce teen pregnancy and birth rates.
- ✓ Fund interventions to improve birth outcomes, focusing on reducing low birth weight rates through maternal health services.

Child Welfare

Key Challenges:

- High rate of children served by Child Welfare Services, with 15.3 per 1,000 children (vs. statewide rate at 11.4).
- The largest number of suspected child abuse cases in our region.
- High rate of victimization per 1,000 children at 17.3 (vs. statewide level at 13.0).

- High rate of children in foster care, with 6.7 children per 1,000 (vs. statewide level at 5.4).
- High rate of children served by Behavioral Health Services, at 73.8 per 1,000 children (vs. statewide level at 64.9).
- Highest rate of children receiving Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services, with 17.7 per 1,000 children (vs. statewide level at 14.0).
- Highest rate of juvenile justice referrals, with 17.8 referrals per 1,000 children (vs. statewide level at 13.6).

Investment Recommendations:

✓ Invest in community-based child abuse prevention programs and strengthen family support services to reduce involvement with the child welfare system.

✓ Expanding access to behavioral health and developmental disability services can help address the needs of at-risk children before they enter foster care or juvenile justice.

✓ Coordinated, trauma-informed interventions across schools, health care, and social services can reduce victimization and improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Summary: Linn County

Linn County faces widespread challenges, especially in rural areas, where families experience high poverty, food insecurity, housing shortages, and limited access to services. Child care is critically scarce, with very low preschool enrollment and few infant/toddler slots, making it difficult for parents to work. Schools struggle with low achievement, absenteeism, teacher shortages, and student homelessness. Children face high rates of maltreatment, foster care involvement, behavioral health concerns, teen pregnancy, and lack of health insurance.

To address these issues, investments should expand rural access to services, strengthen economic supports for low-income families, and increase affordable, high-quality child care. Education improvements should focus on teacher recruitment, early learning transitions, and support for students from historically underserved student groups. Expanding health insurance, prenatal and mental health care, and trauma-informed services is essential. Finally, community-based prevention and intervention programs are needed to reduce child welfare involvement and improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Key Challenges and Strategic Investment Recommendations

Benton County

Demographics

Key Challenges:

- The highest percentage of people speaking a language other than English at 12.9% in our region.

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Expand bilingual early learning and child care services by investing in culturally and linguistically responsive educators, especially in areas with large non-English-speaking populations.
- ✓ Fund professional development and certification pathways for multilingual individuals to become early childhood educators, family support workers, and health navigators.
- ✓ Increase access to interpretation and translation services across early learning, health care, and family support systems to reduce language barriers for families accessing critical services.
- ✓ Develop and distribute multilingual public awareness campaigns to ensure all families are informed about available programs and benefits, including preschool, child care assistance, and parenting resources.
- ✓ Support community-based organizations that serve immigrant and refugee families to co-lead program design, outreach, and service delivery in linguistically inclusive ways.

Families and Economic Well-Being

Key Challenges:

- Medium household income ($76,011) falls below the statewide average ($80,426).
- High percentage of families with children living below the federal poverty level at 14.4% (vs. statewide average at 11.5%).
- High percentage of families with young children (under 5 years old) living below the federal poverty level at 19.7% (vs. statewide average at 11.1%)

- A significant percentage of female-headed households with young children (under 5 years old) living in poverty (64.7%) (vs. the statewide level at 35.4%).
- Highest average home value at approximately $535,000 (vs. statewide average of about $489,000).
- Highest median monthly housing costs in our region, for both homeowners and renters.
- A significant percentage of families with incomes less than $75,000 are experiencing cost-burdened housing issues, especially for low-income families.
- Cost-burdened housing issue: the growing challenge of finding affordable housing, whether buying or renting, due to high costs that often exceed incomes.

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Expanding access to affordable, high-quality child care and early learning programs, particularly for families living below the federal poverty level.
- ✓ Targeted subsidies and sliding-scale tuition models can help working dual-parent households manage the cost of care.
- ✓ Community-specific investments should be made in high-need areas like rural areas, where child poverty rates are disproportionately high.
- ✓ Supporting family economic mobility programs—such as job training, housing stability assistance, and parenting support—can address both immediate and long-term needs.
- ✓ Partnerships with local employers could also enhance family-supportive workplace policies and benefits for low-income working parents.
- ✓ Partner with employers and local governments to explore family-supportive policies such as housing stipends, transportation assistance, and livable wage initiatives for lower-income households.
- ✓ Increase affordable housing development and rental assistance programs to address the severe cost burden driven by high home values and limited rental stock.
- ✓ Support housing stability services that help families avoid eviction or homelessness, including legal aid, mediation, and case management.

Early Learning & Child Care

Key Challenges:

- A child care shortage.
- Lowest public preschool enrollment rate of all enrollments at 37% (vs. statewide level at 47.7%).
- Only 22 out of every 100 children aged 0-2 have access to childcare slots of any type.
- Only 21 out of every 100 children aged 0-2 have access to regulated childcare slots.
- Only 49 out of every 100 children aged 3-5 have access to childcare slots of any type.
- Only 38 out of every 100 children aged 3-5 have access to regulated childcare slots of any type.
- Highest child care costs in our region: 24.9% of median household income for toddler care costs in center care.
- Many families cannot afford child care without subsidies, especially those earning minimum wage, since center care costs can take up to 69.3% of a typical monthly household income for toddler care.
- Low SPARK (Oregon's quality rating and improvement system for early learning programs) participation rate at 40.6%.

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Expanding publicly funded preschool programs to raise enrollment above the current 37%, particularly by increasing the number of slots in underserved communities.
- ✓ Additional funding is needed to grow the infant and toddler care supply, as current availability for children under age 2
- ✓ To ease the cost burden on families—where toddler care consumes around 25% of median income—subsidies and tuition assistance should be expanded for low- and middle-income households.
- ✓ Investments in workforce development and wage supports for early educators can also help stabilize and grow the local provider base.
- ✓ Partner with employers and higher education institutions to pilot on-site or near-site care options tailored to local workforce needs.

K–12 Education

Key Challenges:

- Total K-12 student enrollment has decreased in the 2023-24 school year compared to 2022-23.
- Students from historically underserved student groups (students with disabilities, students in foster care, English learners, children experiencing poverty, and students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or Latinx) show notably low proficiency rates, indicating persistent opportunity gaps.
- High-performing districts (Corvallis, Philomath), but significant disparities in small/rural districts (Alsea, Monroe).
- Persistent low proficiency, graduation issues, systemic attendance problems, and a shortage of experienced teachers highlight a significant education disparity, especially in rural, high-poverty districts (Alsea SD and Monroe SD).
- Alsea SD (12.5%) and Monroe SD (27.3%) fall significantly below the statewide average (39.0%) for third-grade ELA proficiency.
- High student mobility: Alsea SD (23%).
- High poverty rates: Alsea SD (50%).

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Target funding to rural districts like Alsea and Monroe to improve academic outcomes, including expanded literacy support and intervention programs.
- ✓ Invest in recruitment and retention incentives (e.g., housing stipends, signing bonuses) for educators and specialists in small and rural schools.
- ✓ Support shared service models across districts to increase access to counselors, reading specialists, and mental health providers.
- ✓ Fund early literacy initiatives and family engagement programs to boost third-grade ELA proficiency rates in underperforming districts.
- ✓ Expand broadband access and digital learning tools in rural areas to support equitable educational opportunities.
- ✓ Expand early intervention outreach to increase EI/ECSE enrollment, especially in rural areas.
- ✓ Create regional staff-sharing models for specialists in low-capacity rural districts.

Maternal and Child Health

Key Challenges:

- High percentage of young children (under 6 years old) without health insurance at 2.9% (vs. the statewide level at 2.5%).
- High percentage of children (under 19 years old) without health insurance at 3.5% (vs. the statewide level at 3.2%).
- Resident births to Hispanic mothers are the second highest in recent years.
- Both the general fertility rate and total fertility rate have declined over the past decade.
- The lowest general fertility rate and total fertility rate in our region, much lower than the statewide level.
- A large percentage of pregnant women not receiving adequate prenatal care at 4.2%.

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Increase outreach and enrollment assistance to ensure all young children under age six are covered by health insurance, especially in underserved communities.
- ✓ Expand access to maternal and child behavioral health services in rural areas.
- ✓ Invest in home visiting and parenting support programs to reach families with newborns and young children, particularly first-time or isolated parents.
- ✓ Expand culturally responsive prenatal care programs and community-based maternal health services to improve early access and support for expectant mothers.
- ✓ Increase bilingual health navigation and family support services to reduce disparities among underserved populations.
- ✓ Monitor fertility trends and service utilization to adapt programs to the county's changing family demographics.

Child Welfare

Key Challenges:

- High rate of children served by Child Welfare Services, with 11.5 per 1,000 children (vs. statewide rate at 11.4).

- Benton County's child welfare indicators, which outperform Linn and Lincoln counties, may mask gaps in service access, shortages of prevention services, demographic disparities, and underserved populations.

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Expand evidence-based prevention programs—such as home visiting, parenting education, and family support services—to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect before it occurs, especially in rural and underserved communities.
- ✓ Invest in trauma-informed training for educators, child care providers, and health professionals to help identify and respond to signs of abuse early.
- ✓ Strengthen cross-agency collaboration between child welfare, schools, health systems, and community-based organizations to ensure coordinated support for at-risk families.
- ✓ Increase culturally and linguistically responsive outreach to ensure Latinx and other marginalized families are aware of and can access supports.
- ✓ Enhance behavioral health screening and referral systems in schools, primary care, and early childhood settings to improve early detection and access.
- ✓ Use data disaggregation and community feedback to identify hidden disparities and improve equitable service delivery across all communities.

Summary: Benton County

Benton County faces challenges in rural and underserved areas, including high housing costs, poverty, limited child care, and gaps in health and behavioral health services. Rural schools struggle with low achievement and few resources, while families face low preschool enrollment, scarce infant/toddler care, and high child welfare involvement.

Investments should expand equitable access to services, especially for rural, low-income, and linguistically diverse families. Priorities include bilingual early learning and health supports, affordable housing and child care, and more preschool and infant/toddler slots. Targeted support for rural schools—through literacy programs, teacher recruitment, and shared services—can reduce disparities. Expanding behavioral health, home visiting, and culturally responsive care will strengthen maternal and child health. Finally, coordinated, trauma-informed programs are needed to prevent maltreatment and support caregivers.

Key Challenges and Strategic Investment Recommendations

Lincoln County

Demographics

Key Challenges:

- The most significant percentage of people and children live in rural areas.
- The highest percentage of people speaking Spanish is at 6.6% in our region.
- A large percentage of the population with a racial origin from American Indian and Alaska Native at 2.5% (vs. the statewide number at 1.1%).

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Expand rural access to services by investing in early learning, health, and family support services, to ensure families in remote areas can access critical resources.
- ✓ Hire and train bilingual and bicultural staff in education, health care, and family support services to better serve Spanish-speaking communities.
- ✓ Develop culturally responsive services and partnerships with local tribal organizations to support American Indian and Alaska Native children and families.
- ✓ Create inclusive outreach materials and programming in multiple languages and cultural formats to ensure all families are aware of and can access available resources.

Families and Economic Well-Being

Key Challenges:

- Lowest median household income at $61,314 in our region (vs. statewide average at $80,426).
- Lowest median family income at $76,426 (vs. statewide average at $98,832).
- Highest percentage of families with children living below the federal poverty level at 20.4% (vs. statewide average at 11.5%).
- Highest percentage of families with young children (under 5 years old) living below the federal poverty level at 40.7% (vs. statewide average at 11.1%).

- Highest percentage of children living in poverty (22.0%) (vs. statewide average at 13.3%).
- The highest percentage of young children (under 5 years old) living below the federal poverty level at 31.1% (vs. the statewide average at 14.4%).
- The highest percentage of children with disabilities living below the federal poverty level at 29.4% (vs. the statewide average at 21.4%).
- The highest percentage of families with children receiving Food Stamps/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) at 34.2% (vs. the statewide level at 22.2%).
- A significant percentage of female-headed households with young children (under 5 years old) living in poverty (81.9%) (vs. statewide level at 35.4%).
- Highest all-home rent at $2,049 per month among the three counties.
- High median monthly housing costs for both homeowners and renters.
- A significant percentage of families with incomes less than $75,000 are experiencing cost-burdened housing issues, especially for low-income families.
- Cost-burdened housing issue: the growing challenge of finding affordable housing, whether buying or renting, due to high costs that often exceed incomes.

Investment Recommendations:

- ✓ Expand access to affordable child care and preschool to support working parents, especially single-parent households.
- ✓ Increase job training and employment programs targeted at low-income families to help raise household incomes.
- ✓ Strengthen support for families with children with disabilities, including financial assistance and specialized services.
- ✓ Enhance outreach and enrollment for SNAP and other public benefit programs to ensure eligible families receive support.
- ✓ Invest in rural service delivery, such as mobile health, child care, and family support services, to reach families far from service centers.
- ✓ Support the development of affordable housing and offer rental assistance to reduce cost burdens on low-income families or single-mother families.
- ✓ Partner with schools and local agencies to provide wraparound services for children living in poverty, including meals, transportation, and tutoring.

Early Learning & Child Care

Key Challenges:

- A severe child care shortage.
- Low preschool enrollment rate of all enrollments at 46.2%.
- Only 9 out of every 100 children aged 0-2 have access to childcare slots of any type.
- Only 6 out of every 100 children aged 0-2 have access to regulated childcare slots.
- Only 48 out of every 100 children aged 3-5 have access to childcare slots of any type.
- Only 30 out of every 100 children aged 3-5 have access to regulated childcare slots.
- High child care costs in our region: 20.5% of median household income for toddler care costs in center care.
- Many families cannot afford child care without subsidies, especially those earning minimum wage, since center care costs can take up to 46.2% of a typical monthly household income for toddler care.
- Low SPARK (Oregon's quality rating and improvement system for early learning programs) participation rate at 36.7% (vs. statewide level at 33.8%).

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Increase public investment in infant and toddler care infrastructure, especially in underserved areas, by expanding funding for start-up grants and facility upgrades.
- ✓ Subsidize child care for low- and moderate-income families, ensuring affordability and access for households burdened by high care costs.
- ✓ Support workforce recruitment and retention through wage enhancement, benefits, and professional development for early educators, especially in infant/toddler care.
- ✓ Expand partnerships with K–12 and Head Start programs to boost preschool enrollment and create more mixed-delivery preschool opportunities.
- ✓ Incentivize SPARK participation and quality improvements by offering technical assistance, training stipends, and tiered reimbursement bonuses.
- ✓ Build more regulated care options by simplifying licensing pathways and supporting providers through the process.

- ✓ Develop flexible, community-based solutions like shared services alliances, co-op care models, or mobile early learning programs to serve rural families.
- ✓ Invest in training and hiring culturally and linguistically responsive caregivers to support diverse families.

K–12 Education

Key Challenges:

- Total K-12 student enrollment has decreased in the 2023-24 school year compared to 2022-23.
- Students from historically underserved student groups (students with disabilities, students in foster care, English learners, children experiencing poverty, and students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or Latinx) show notably low proficiency rates, indicating persistent opportunity gaps.
- Persistent low proficiency, graduation issues, systemic attendance problems, and a shortage of experienced teachers highlight a significant education disparity.
- Low student achievement in ELA, math, and science.
- Lincoln County SD (30.4%) falls significantly below the statewide average (39.0%) for third-grade ELA proficiency.
- Lincoln County SD has the highest percentage of students experiencing homelessness in our region at about 14.6% (vs. the statewide average at 4.1%).
- Lincoln County SD (30.4%) falls significantly below the statewide average (39.0%) for third-grade ELA proficiency.
- Lincoln County SD has the highest student poverty rate at 43%.
- High student-to-counselor/psychologist ratio: 221:1.
- SPED placement challenges:
    - Only 65.3% of students with IEPs are in regular classrooms (well below Oregon's 77% target)
    - 22% in separate classes – highest in the region
    - 1.13% in separate settings (approaching the 1.6% max target)

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Invest in early literacy programs to improve third-grade ELA proficiency, including tutoring, summer reading programs, and family literacy nights.

- ✓ Expand targeted academic support programs in ELA, math, and science for underserved student groups.
- ✓ Increase funding for recruitment and retention of experienced teachers, especially in rural and high-poverty schools.
- ✓ Invest in full-time school counselors, psychologists, and social workers to reduce student-to-staff ratios and address trauma and chronic absenteeism.
- ✓ Support after-school and summer programs for homeless and low-income students to improve academic outcomes.
- ✓ Fund inclusive special education training and classroom supports to increase the placement of students with IEPs in regular classrooms.
- ✓ Strengthen early intervention and EI/ECSE services to identify and support children with developmental delays earlier.
- ✓ Partner with community organizations to provide wraparound services and stability supports for students experiencing homelessness.
- ✓ Implement school-based mentoring or check-in programs to build strong relationships and increase student engagement and attendance.

Maternal and Child Health

Key Challenges:

- High percentage of young children (under 6 years old) without health insurance at 3.7%, (vs. statewide level at 2.5%).
- High percentage of children (under 19 years old) without health insurance at 3.4% (vs. the statewide level at 3.2%)
- Resident births to Hispanic mothers are the second highest in recent years.
- Both the general fertility rate and total fertility rate have declined over the past decade.
- The highest rate of new births to unmarried mothers at 54.4%, exceeding the statewide rate of 37.6%.
- The highest percentage of pregnant women receiving inadequate prenatal care at 5.9% in our region.
- The highest percentage of pregnant women using tobacco at 8.2% (vs. the statewide average at 3.5%)
- The highest Teen Pregnancy Rate and Teen Birth Rate, much higher than the statewide levels.

- Lowest immunization rate among the three counties, standing at 66.5% (vs. statewide average at 68.3%)
- A large percentage of pregnant women not receiving adequate prenatal care at 5.9%.

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Expand outreach and enrollment assistance for public health insurance to reduce uninsured rates among young children
- ✓ Expand access to prenatal care and parenting support for unmarried and teen mothers.
- ✓ Expand access to culturally responsive prenatal and maternal health services, especially for unmarried mothers and those from Latino or American Indian and Alaska Native backgrounds.
- ✓ Provide tobacco cessation programs tailored for pregnant women and caregivers.
- ✓ Boost immunization rates through school and community-based vaccine clinics.
- ✓ Support community health worker programs to improve early prenatal care and connect families to local resources.
- ✓ Strengthen teen pregnancy prevention efforts through education, health access, and family engagement programs.
- ✓ Partner with schools and youth programs to provide comprehensive teen pregnancy prevention and sexual health education.

Child Welfare

Key Challenges:

- Highest rate of children served by Child Welfare Services, with 21 per 1,000 children (vs. statewide rate at 11.4)
- Highest rate of victimization per 1,000 children at 22.2 (vs. statewide level at 13.0)
- Highest rate of children in foster care, with 8.8 children per 1,000 (vs. statewide level at 5.4)
- Highest rate of children served by Behavioral Health Services, at 103.1 per 1,000 children (vs. statewide level at 64.9).
- High rate of children receiving Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services, with 13.3 per 1,000 children (vs. statewide level at 14.0).

- High rate of juvenile justice referrals, with 17.4 referrals per 1,000 children (vs. statewide level at 13.6).

Investment Recommendations

- ✓ Expand family preservation and parenting support programs.
- ✓ Increase access to trauma-informed and school-based behavioral health services.
- ✓ Strengthen foster family supports, including respite and mental health care.
- ✓ Invest in community-based prevention and early intervention programs.
- ✓ Provide mentoring and diversion opportunities to support youth development.
- ✓ Improve coordination across child welfare, behavioral health, and juvenile justice systems.

Summary: Lincoln County

Lincoln County faces serious challenges in rural and low-income communities, with high poverty, food insecurity, and cost-burdened housing creating instability for families. Many households are single-parent, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Spanish-speaking, underscoring the need for culturally and linguistically responsive services and stronger partnerships with Tribal nations. Access to affordable child care is extremely limited, while schools struggle with low achievement, high absenteeism, and very high student homelessness rate. Maternal and child health concerns include high teen pregnancy, low immunization rates, and unmet behavioral health needs in rural areas. The county also has the region's highest rates of child abuse, foster care placements, and juvenile justice referrals.

Investments should expand rural access to services, affordable housing, and child care, while supporting single-parent, Tribal, and low-income families. Priorities include culturally responsive early learning and health programs, Tribal-led initiatives, targeted academic and attendance supports, and wraparound services for homeless and at-risk students. Expanding maternal and behavioral health care, including prevention of teen pregnancy, is critical. Finally, coordinated, trauma-informed approaches in child welfare and behavioral health systems—developed in partnership with Tribal communities—are essential to protect and support vulnerable children and families.

Key Challenges and Strategic Investment Recommendations

Cross-County

Cross-County Common Key Challenges

1. Rural Service Access

All three counties have large rural populations where families face transportation barriers, limited provider availability, and longer travel times for health care, early learning, and family support services. Coastal and remote inland communities are especially underserved.

2. Affordable, High-Quality Child Care

The region is a child care desert, particularly for infants and toddlers. Costs are high relative to income, making care unaffordable without subsidies. Provider shortages and low wages for early educators further limit availability and quality.

3. Preschool Enrollment & Early Literacy

Preschool enrollment rates are low in all counties, with Linn having the lowest. Early literacy and math proficiency are particularly low in rural and high-poverty districts especially for historically underserved student groups, affecting school readiness and long-term achievement.

Third Grade ELA Proficiency Rates by School District, 2023–24

School District	Proficiency Rate
Alsea SD 7J	12.5%
Monroe SD 1J	27.3%
Central Linn SD 552	27.6%
Lincoln County SD	30.4%
Scio SD 95	32.4%
Sweet Home SD 55	36.7%
Santiam Canyon SD 129J	38.6%
Statewide	39.0%
Lebanon Community SD 9	40.4%
Greater Albany Public SD 8J	41.3%
Corvallis SD 509J	49.3%
Harrisburg SD 7J	52.7%
Philomath SD 17J	57.6%

Data Source: Science Assessment Report, Oregon Department of Education.

4. Child & Family Poverty Supports

Child poverty rates exceed statewide averages, with Lincoln and Linn facing the highest rates. Families headed by single mothers and those with young children are most at risk. Reliance on SNAP and other assistance is widespread, but access can be hindered by rural isolation.

5. Housing Affordability & Stability

Housing costs are rising faster than incomes, leading to high cost burdens for low- and moderate-income households. Affordable rental housing is scarce, and homelessness rates among students are above state averages in some school districts.

6. K–12 Student Support

Academic performance lags in rural and high-poverty districts, especially for historically underserved student groups. Chronic absenteeism, teacher shortages, and limited access to specialists exacerbate opportunity gaps. Student homelessness and instability disrupt learning.

Third Grade ELA Proficiency Rate by Student Group in EL Hub Region, 2023-24

Student Group	Proficiency Rate
Students with Disabilities (SWD)	20.1%
Hispanic/Latino	26.2%
Students Experiencing Poverty	28.7%
Homeless	29.8%
English Learners	30.4%
Male	36.6%
Total Population (All Students)	40.2%
Multi-Racial	43.8%
Female	44.7%
White	46.0%
Asian	70.9%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	*
Black/African American	*
Indian Education	*
Pacific Islander	*
Students in Foster Care	*
Statewide (All Students)	42.5%

Data Source: Science Assessment Report, Oregon Department of Education.

7. Maternal & Child Health

Uninsured rates for young children are higher than the statewide average. Some areas have high rates of inadequate prenatal care, teen pregnancy, and

tobacco use during pregnancy. Rural areas face shortages of maternal health providers and pediatric specialists.

8. Behavioral Health Access

Behavioral health service needs for children are high across the region, with the highest rates in Lincoln and Linn. Access to timely, culturally appropriate, and trauma-informed services is limited, especially in rural areas.

9. Child Welfare Prevention & Response

All three counties have higher rates of child welfare involvement than the state average. Rates of child maltreatment, foster care placement, and juvenile justice referrals are highest in Lincoln and Linn, signaling strong needs for prevention and family support services.

10. Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Services

The Hispanic/Latino population is growing across the region, and Benton has the highest share of residents who speak a language other than English. Lincoln County has the largest percentage of the population with a racial origin from American Indian and Alaska Native in three counties, higher than the statewide number. Gaps remain in culturally specific programming, bilingual early learning options, and provider diversity.

Areas with Key Challenges and Priority Ratings by County Ratings: 🔴 High Priority 🟡 Medium Priority 🟢 Low Priority			
Areas	**Linn County**	**Benton County**	**Lincoln County**
Rural Service Access	🔴 **High** – largest rural child population, transportation barriers, service deserts	🟡 **Medium** – rural gaps in Alsea/Monroe but urban core has strong access	🔴 **High** – high rural population, remote coastal areas, limited providers
Affordable, High-Quality Child Care	🔴 **High** – lowest preschool enrollment, severe infant/toddler shortage, high costs	🔴 **High** – high costs (25%+ of median income), low infant/toddler supply	🔴 **High** – severe shortage, high costs, limited regulated care
Preschool Enrollment & Early Literacy	🔴 **High** – 27.7% enrollment, lowest in region; ELA proficiency gaps in multiple districts	🟡 **Medium** – Corvallis/Philomath strong, but rural underperformance in Alsea/Monroe	🔴 **High** – low enrollment, large achievement gaps, high poverty impact
Child & Family Poverty Supports	🔴 **High** – high child poverty, food insecurity, female-headed household poverty	🟡 **Medium** – high rural poverty pockets, but overall higher incomes than Linn or Lincoln	🔴 **High** – highest poverty rates in all categories, SNAP dependency
Housing Affordability & Stability	🔴 **High** – cost-burdened low-income families, high rental costs	🔴 **High** – highest home values, rental costs in region, cost burden	🔴 **High** – highest rents, severe cost burden, housing instability
K–12 Student Support	🔴 **High** – low proficiency, chronic absenteeism, teacher shortages, high SPED rates	🟡 **Medium** – strong urban districts, but rural schools face significant gaps	🔴 **High** – low proficiency, high homelessness, underserved student groups
Maternal & Child Health	🔴 **High** – highest uninsured children, low birth weight, teen pregnancy	🟡 **Medium** – uninsured and prenatal care gaps in rural areas	🔴 **High** – high uninsured, low prenatal care, highest teen pregnancy
Behavioral Health Access	🔴 **High** – high child BH service rates, rural gaps, trauma needs	🟡 **Medium** – needs in rural areas, but lower overall prevalence	🔴 **High** – highest child BH service rates, high trauma exposure
Child Welfare Prevention & Response	🔴 **High** – high abuse/victimization, foster care, juvenile justice rates	🟡 **Medium** – lower rates, but prevention gaps remain	🔴 **High** – highest abuse/victimization, foster care, juvenile justice rates
Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Services	🟡 **Medium** – growing Hispanic population	🔴 **High** – highest non-English-speaking population, multilingual needs	🔴 **High** – high Spanish-speaking population, tribal community need
Summary: • ***Lincoln County*** *has high priority in all areas due to compounded rural isolation, poverty, education challenges, and high-risk child welfare indicators.* • ***Linn County*** *has high priority in nearly every category except Lincoln and Benton's unique language access needs.* • ***Benton County*** *generally ranks medium except for child care, housing and rural district support, where the gaps are pronounced.*			

Notes: *How the ratings were set:* ***High*** *= urgent need based on county data and key challenges;* ***Medium*** *= important but less severe or more resources already in place;* ***Low*** *= minimal gap or already addressed at sufficient levels (none here given the broad needs).*

Cross-County Investment Recommendations

1. Rural Service Access

- ✓ Expand mobile health, early learning, and family support units to reach remote communities.
- ✓ Fund transportation assistance programs for families traveling to access essential services.
- ✓ Incentivize providers to serve rural areas through loan supports, housing stipends, or operational grants.

2. Affordable, High-Quality Child Care

- ✓ Provide start-up and expansion grants for child care providers, with a focus on infant/toddler care.
- ✓ Increase child care subsidies for low- and middle-income families to reduce cost burden.
- ✓ Fund wage enhancements, benefits, and professional development for early educators to stabilize the workforce.

3. Preschool Enrollment & Early Literacy

- ✓ Expand publicly funded preschool slots, prioritizing rural and high-poverty communities.
- ✓ Strengthen preschool-to-K–3 transitions with coordinated literacy and readiness programs.
- ✓ Fund family engagement and home literacy initiatives to support learning outside of school.

4. Child & Family Poverty Supports

- ✓ Expand enrollment in SNAP, TANF, and WIC through mobile outreach and community navigators.
- ✓ Partner with workforce development agencies to offer job training, apprenticeships, and childcare support for parents.
- ✓ Provide targeted supports for single-parent households, including transportation and housing stipends.

5. Housing Affordability & Stability

- ✓ Increase local affordable housing development through public–private partnerships.
- ✓ Expand rental assistance and eviction prevention programs for families with children.
- ✓ Co-locate family support services in housing developments to reduce instability.

6. K–12 Student Support

- ✓ Fund recruitment and retention incentives for teachers and specialists in high-need districts.
- ✓ Expand school-based mental health, counseling, and wraparound services to address absenteeism and trauma.
- ✓ Invest in after-school, summer learning, and tutoring programs targeting low-proficiency schools.

7. Maternal & Child Health

- ✓ Expand culturally responsive prenatal and postpartum care, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- ✓ Fund teen pregnancy prevention and parenting support programs.
- ✓ Increase access to home visiting, lactation support, and early childhood health screenings.

8. Behavioral Health Access

- ✓ Increase availability of school-based and community-based behavioral health services.
- ✓ Fund trauma-informed training for educators, child care providers, and health professionals.
- ✓ Support integrated care models linking behavioral health, primary care, and early learning programs.

9. Child Welfare Prevention & Response

- ✓ Invest in child abuse prevention, foster care supports.
- ✓ Invest in evidence-based family preservation programs, such as intensive home visiting and parenting education.
- ✓ Increase respite care, kinship care supports, and foster family recruitment.
- ✓ Improve coordination between child welfare, behavioral health, schools, and juvenile justice agencies.

10. Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Services

- ✓ Hire and train bilingual, bicultural staff across early learning, health care, and family support services.
- ✓ Provide interpretation, translation, and multilingual outreach for all core programs.
- ✓ Partner with culturally specific organizations to co-design and deliver services.
- ✓ Develop culturally responsive services and partnerships with local tribal organizations to support tribal children and families.

Strategic Investment Recommendations Aligned with Raise Up Oregon 2024-2028 Objectives & Strategies

Areas	Objectives	Relevant Strategies
Rural Service Access	Obj. 2, 3, 5	2.2 – Coordinate supports across agencies for family preservation. 2.3 – Increase access to One Eligibility/Oregon Eligibility Partnership. 2.6 – Implement locally developed, state-supported home visiting coordination. 2.8 – Co-locate affordable housing and early childhood programs. 3.1 – Hubs convene partners to develop and implement regional plans. 3.2 – Hubs engage under-represented families in policy/program development. 5.3 – Promote service locations that are more accessible.
Affordable, High-Quality Child Care	Obj. 4, 6, 14, 15	4.1 – Build supply of child care through public–private partnerships. 6.3 – Expand categorical eligibility for child care assistance. 14.1 – Expand availability (workforce, facilities, transportation). 14.2 – Increase state investment in quality care. 14.5 – Build workforce pathways. 14.6 – Ensure licensing is equitable and supportive. 14.9 – Reduce family financial burden. 14.11 – Compensate and recognize educators. 15.1 – Improve professional development. 15.2 – Build credentials pathways.
Preschool Enrollment & Early Literacy	Obj. 2, 14, 16	2.4 – Align early literacy standards between K–2 and early learning. 14.1 – Expand availability. 14.9 – Reduce family financial burden. 16.1 – Update Early Learning & Kindergarten Guidelines. 16.3 – Align policies for supportive transitions.
Child & Family Poverty Supports	Obj. 4, 5, 6	4.2 – Support family well-being services (paid leave, health insurance, apprenticeships). 5.1 – Strengthen coordinated, family-centered intake and referral. 5.2 – Expand navigators. 6.1 – End full family TANF sanctions. 6.2 – Support paid leave and EITC. 6.3 – Expand child care assistance eligibility for vulnerable families.
Housing Affordability & Stability	Obj. 2, 9	2.8 – Co-locate housing and early childhood programs. 9.1 – Prioritize housing for families with young children in QAP. 9.2 – Incentivize rural developers. 9.3 – Remove regulatory barriers to co-location.

Areas	Objectives	Relevant Strategies
K–12 Student Support	Obj. 2, 16	2.4 – Align literacy standards between K–2 and early learning. 16.1 – Update Early Learning & Kindergarten Guidelines. 16.2 – Joint PD for early learning and K–2 educators. 16.3 – Align transition and continuity policies.
Maternal & Child Health	Obj. 5, 7, 11	5.4 – Support Community Information Exchange (CIE) statewide. 5.5 – Continuous Medicaid/OHP enrollment from birth to age 6. 7.1 – Increase access to reproductive, maternal, prenatal services. 7.3 – Improve access to nutritional support (WIC, breastfeeding). 7.4 – Expand community health workers and doulas. 11.2 – Ensure comprehensive, accessible, culturally responsive pediatric services. 11.3 – Provide trauma-informed care/resilience training for pediatric providers.
Behavioral Health Access	Obj. 7, 11, 12, 13, 14	7.2 – Improve access to culturally responsive multi-generational health supports. 11.5 – Increase mental health providers trained in infant/early childhood services. 12.1 – Trauma-informed care and resilience training for early childhood professionals. 12.2 – Provide culturally responsive infant & early childhood mental health supports. 12.3 – Include social/emotional/trauma screening in all relevant systems. 13.3 – Increase the number of children with developmental delays and disabilities receiving services. 14.7 – Increase inclusion opportunities for children with developmental delays and disabilities.
Child Welfare Prevention & Response	Obj. 2, 8, 10	2.2 – Coordinate supports across agencies for family preservation. 8.1 – Collaborate with tribal nations on culturally specific family preservation services. 8.2 – Expand evidence-based, culturally responsive early childhood programs that reduce abuse/neglect. 8.3 – Improve coordination between Child Welfare and other agencies. 10.1 – Expand parenting and family education. 10.2 – Increase access to culturally responsive home visiting. 10.3 – Build regional structures for family leadership in home visiting policy. 10.5 – Increase cross-sector collaboration for home visiting.
Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Services	Obj. 1, 5, 14, 15	1.3 – Promote and preserve tribal culture. 5.1 – Strengthen coordinated, family-centered intake and referral. 5.2 – Expand navigators. 14.4 – Improve PD for diverse workforce. 15.2 – Build pathways for recruiting/retaining diverse workforce.

Aligned with Raise Up Oregon 2024-2028 Plan with Priority Ratings by County Ratings: 🔴 High Priority 🟡 Medium Priority 🟢 Low Priority				
Areas	**Objectives**	**Linn County**	**Benton County**	**Lincoln County**
Rural Service Access	Obj. 2, 3, 5	🔴 **High** – largest rural child population, transportation barriers, service deserts	🟡 **Medium** – rural gaps in Alsea/Monroe but urban core has strong access	🔴 **High** – high rural population, remote coastal areas, limited providers
Affordable, High-Quality Child Care	Obj. 4, 6, 14, 15	🔴 **High** – lowest preschool enrollment, severe infant/toddler shortage, high costs	🔴 **High** – high costs (25%+ of median income), low infant/toddler supply	🔴 **High** – severe shortage, high costs, limited regulated care
Preschool Enrollment & Early Literacy	Obj. 2, 14, 16	🔴 **High** – 27.7% enrollment, lowest in region; ELA proficiency gaps in multiple districts	🟡 **Medium** – Corvallis/Philomath strong, but rural underperformance in Alsea/Monroe	🔴 **High** – low enrollment, large achievement gaps, high poverty impact
Child & Family Poverty Supports	Obj. 4, 5, 6	🔴 **High** – high child poverty, food insecurity, female-headed household poverty	🟡 **Medium** – high rural poverty pockets, but overall higher incomes than Linn or Lincoln	🔴 **High** – highest poverty rates in all categories, SNAP dependency
Housing Affordability & Stability	Obj. 2, 9	🔴 **High** – cost-burdened low-income families, high rental costs	🔴 **High** – highest home values, rental costs in region, cost burden	🔴 **High** – highest rents, severe cost burden, housing instability
K–12 Student Support	Obj. 2, 16	🔴 **High** – low proficiency, chronic absenteeism, teacher shortages, high SPED rates	🟡 **Medium** – strong urban districts, but rural schools face significant gaps	🔴 **High** – low proficiency, high homelessness, underserved student groups
Maternal & Child Health	Obj. 5, 7, 11	🔴 **High** – highest uninsured children, low birth weight, teen pregnancy	🟡 **Medium** – uninsured and prenatal care gaps in rural areas	🔴 **High** – high uninsured, low prenatal care, highest teen pregnancy
Behavioral Health Access	Obj. 7, 11, 12, 13, 14	🔴 **High** – high child BH service rates, rural gaps, trauma needs	🟡 **Medium** – needs in rural areas, but lower overall prevalence	🔴 **High** – highest child BH service rates, high trauma exposure
Child Welfare Prevention & Response	Obj. 2, 8, 10	🔴 **High** – high abuse/victimization, foster care, juvenile justice rates	🟡 **Medium** – lower rates, but prevention gaps remain	🔴 **High** – highest abuse/victimization, foster care, juvenile justice rates
Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Services	Obj. 1, 5, 14, 15	🟡 **Medium** – growing Hispanic population	🔴 **High** – highest non-English-speaking population, multilingual needs	🔴 **High** – high Spanish-speaking population, tribal community need

Summary: Cross-County

Across Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties, children and families face interconnected challenges rooted in poverty, housing instability, rural isolation, and limited access to services. Rural communities experience higher rates of economic hardship, food insecurity, and difficulty accessing child care, health care, and education. Affordable, high-quality early learning and child care—especially for infants and toddlers—are severely lacking across all three counties, placing strain on working families. Schools in rural districts struggle with low achievement, absenteeism, and teacher shortages, while student homelessness remains a significant issue, especially in Lincoln County. Maternal and child health concerns are widespread, including uninsured young children, behavioral health needs, teen pregnancy, and limited culturally responsive care. Lincoln County and Linn County also report high levels of child maltreatment and child welfare involvement, with Tribal, Hispanic, and linguistically diverse families facing added barriers to equitable access.

To address these challenges, investments should focus on expanding rural access to affordable housing, child care, health, and family services, while strengthening supports for low-income, single-parent, Tribal, and linguistically diverse households. Key priorities include building early learning and infant-toddler care capacity, improving school readiness and K–12 outcomes through teacher recruitment, literacy supports, and attendance initiatives, and expanding behavioral health, maternal care, and trauma-informed services. Coordinated, culturally and linguistically responsive approaches—developed in partnership with Tribal nations and community organizations—are essential for preventing child maltreatment, reducing disparities, and improving long-term outcomes for children and families across the region.

Closing Summary

Communities across Linn, Benton, and Lincoln Counties face intertwined struggles—marked by poverty, housing instability, limited access to culturally and linguistically responsive services, childcare shortages, school inequities, gaps in maternal and child health, and disproportionately high rates of child welfare involvement. Rural, Tribal, and underserved families often bear the greatest burdens.

The Early Learning Hub of Linn, Benton and Lincoln Counties envisions a region where families are stable, children are ready for kindergarten, and services are coordinated, equitable, family-centered, and culturally competent

This vision aligns closely with Oregon's broader Raise Up Oregon 2024–2028 framework, which advances three system-level goals

- **System Goal 1:** The early childhood system is equitable: integrated, accessible, inclusive, anti-racist, and family centered.
- **System Goal 2:** All families with young children are supported to ensure their well-being.
- **System Goal 3:** All children are thriving in early childhood and beyond.

By weaving together shared regional challenges, the Hub's unified vision, and these statewide priorities, the path forward becomes clear: sustained, cross-sector investments—guided by equity, cultural responsiveness, and collaboration with Tribal nations and community partners—are essential to build a system that supports families, empowers children to thrive, and dismantles disparities across the region.