

RESEARCH IN OREGON COMMUNITIES' REVIEW SYSTEM

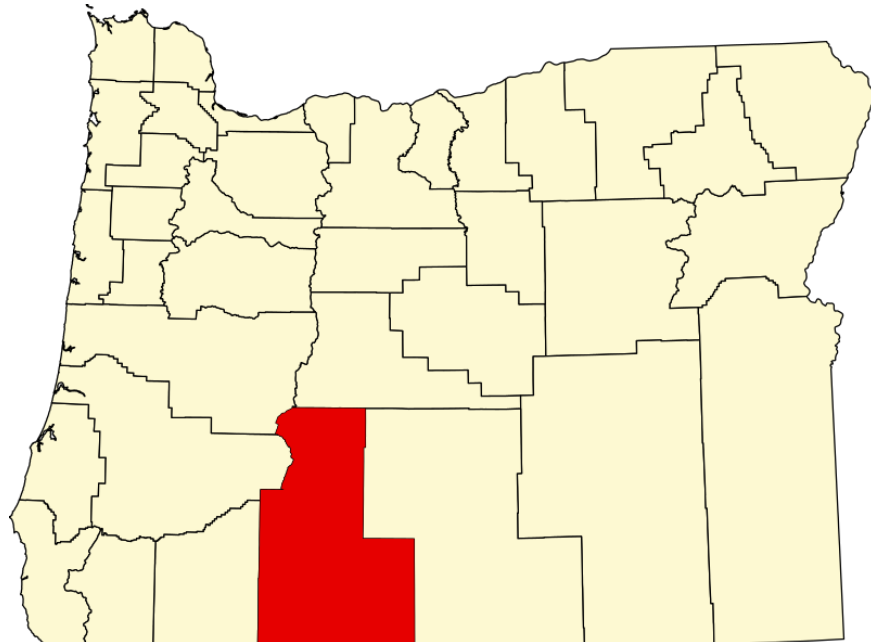
# Klamath County Cultural Landscape

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## About this document



This locally-developed landscape is intended to describe the region of interest, to help guide design choices for proposed cancer prevention and control projects and/or clinical trial research implementation.

Data collected in response to the development of this landscape was offered by community leaders in the region. This regionally-specific cultural landscape is the first step along the Research in Oregon Communities' Review System (ROCRS), supported by OHSU Community Outreach, Research and Engagement (CORE).

CORE supports community-academic partnerships, gathers community input for academic research, and increases research in community settings that is responsive to the pressing health concerns of residents in Oregon. To learn more, [visit our website](#) or contact us at [CommunityResearch@ohsu.edu](mailto:CommunityResearch@ohsu.edu).



## Critical regional consideration

Anything proposed or conducted in this region must consider the Klamath Tribes' (Klamath, Modoc, Yahooskin) sovereign rights, interests, perspectives, and needs. Sovereignty includes mental and emotional headspace, not just physical territory.

Tribes have a Tribal court and oversee family law, holding some authority over juvenile detention. Tribes are equal to the state, superseding county jurisdiction. Klamath County and Klamath Tribes collaborate in public hearings when issues impact the whole community. Otherwise, Tribes seldom get involved in local politics.

Tribes offered and opened COVID-19 vaccination clinics to everyone, not just Tribal members.

10 years ago, the Klamath Tribes developed a free transportation system for all. This free transportation system remains in place today, running weekdays. On 2 days, the service heads east/takes the "long way" to drive through rural towns. The Tribal seat is Chiloquin (800 people), though the majority of people live in the city of Klamath Falls. The Tribes knew they would have riders going back and forth. Few people like to drive along the lake in the winter – Hwy 97 can be bad. The bus can bring bikes or wheelchairs.

## Highest regional need

### Environmental improvements to both air and water

The Klamath Basin Water Crisis heavily impacts politics, people, health, socioeconomics, etc., across agriculture and farming industries, with negative effects on fishing populations, Tribal lands, treaty rights, and dry wells. Severe drought affects parks and playing fields, depleting areas for families and children to recreate. Oregon State University (OSU) Extension is looking for solutions to the drought to continue local food production.

Klamath County has experienced 50 years of high levels of respiratory ailments (known colloquially as "Klamath crud"), possibly due to stagnant air or air inversions. As a result of high rates of respiratory disease, lung cancer is within the community's consciousness.

**RESEARCHER PRO TIP:** People are willing to collaborate on these issues when a problem is viewed as community-wide, like wildfire smoke. Research around air quality, agriculture, and health has been a regional priority.

### Successful environmental efforts

[Healthy Klamath](#) (A.K.A. Blue Zones) raises awareness, provides a strong foundation for generating new health behaviors, and creates environments supportive of healthy activities.

The [Klamath River Renewal Corporation](#) is a private, independent nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization formed by signatories of the amended Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement. This local, Tribal, national, and state governmental collaboration resulted in the removal of four dams south of Klamath Falls. The first dam was removed in 2023.

### Tobacco prevention committees

Tobacco retail licensing passed in 2019. Revenue from Oregon Health Authority (OHA) state funds 1% of this work.



## Klamath supports an energetic collaboration of agencies and resources

When the community rallies behind an issue or problem, strong partnerships and collaborations that cross organizations and agencies can accomplish and move efforts quickly.

**RESEARCHER PRO TIP:** Collaborate to successfully conduct work in Klamath County.

- Healthy Klamath – community health and wellness coalition, inclusive of a robust and thriving food security network.
- [Klamath Promise](#) – schools and community coalition.
- [Klamath Works](#) – assists in reentry and job skills development.
- [Klamath Connect](#) – referral system that connects people to services or agencies, and between agencies in the county.
- New coalition in development – Oregon Institute of Technology (Oregon Tech) is partnering with Klamath and Lakeview partners to develop a South-Central Oregon Regional Innovation (SCORI) Hub. Inclusive of geographically isolated towns such as Alturas, Dorris, Rocky Point, North County, and Lakeview.

## Regular events infuse money into the region's economy

**RESEARCHER PRO TIP:** Identify and attend popular events that may relate to the work you want to conduct.

Many live for and return for rodeos and fairs. Klamath Fair brings in a lot of money – hotels are booked, and many vendors arrive or depend on these events as a significant income-earning time point. Tribes run educational gatherings; culture camp, elder fair, women's fair, men's fair, restoration powwow, and a New Year's Eve powwow honoring those who stay sober.

Children's sports are big events in the community and there is support for families with lower incomes to participate.

## Socioeconomic fabric of Klamath

January–March/April and September/October are good times to engage folks. September = hunting season. Summer = work hiatus.

**RESEARCHER PRO TIP:** Pay attention to folks' availability to participate in research efforts vs. make money for their families. Klamath has a relatively high youth (under 18) population (22.1%). Oregon's overall rate is 19.6%.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment rates increased dramatically. Housing prices skyrocketed and housing availability was and continues to be low, which spurred the construction of an RV park.

- Tribes developed a Community Health Worker network; if folks could not conduct their regular work/job, they would deliver food and prescriptions to those in quarantine and check in on remote-living residents.
- As of April 2024, Klamath County had Oregon's 5<sup>th</sup> highest unemployment rate (4.8%).

[\[1\]](#)

- Downtown Klamath has an unofficial service hub for the unhoused: [Gospel Mission](#), a warming station with high barrier to entry, Department of Human Services (DHS), and [Sky Lakes Wellness](#). Sky Lakes Wellness offers services to those on the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), without insurance, and some prescription deliveries.

## Major employers

- Jeld-Wen
- Klamath Tribes
- Sky Lakes
- County, city, and law enforcement offices
- Bureau of Land Management
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Kingsley Field
- Agriculture

Klamath’s median income is low – \$53,923 in 2022, compared to Oregon’s \$75,657.<sup>[2]</sup> There is a large income disparity between those who identify as American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) (\$35,313) and non-Hispanic Whites (\$55,913). The group with the highest median income is Hispanic or Latino (\$62,255).

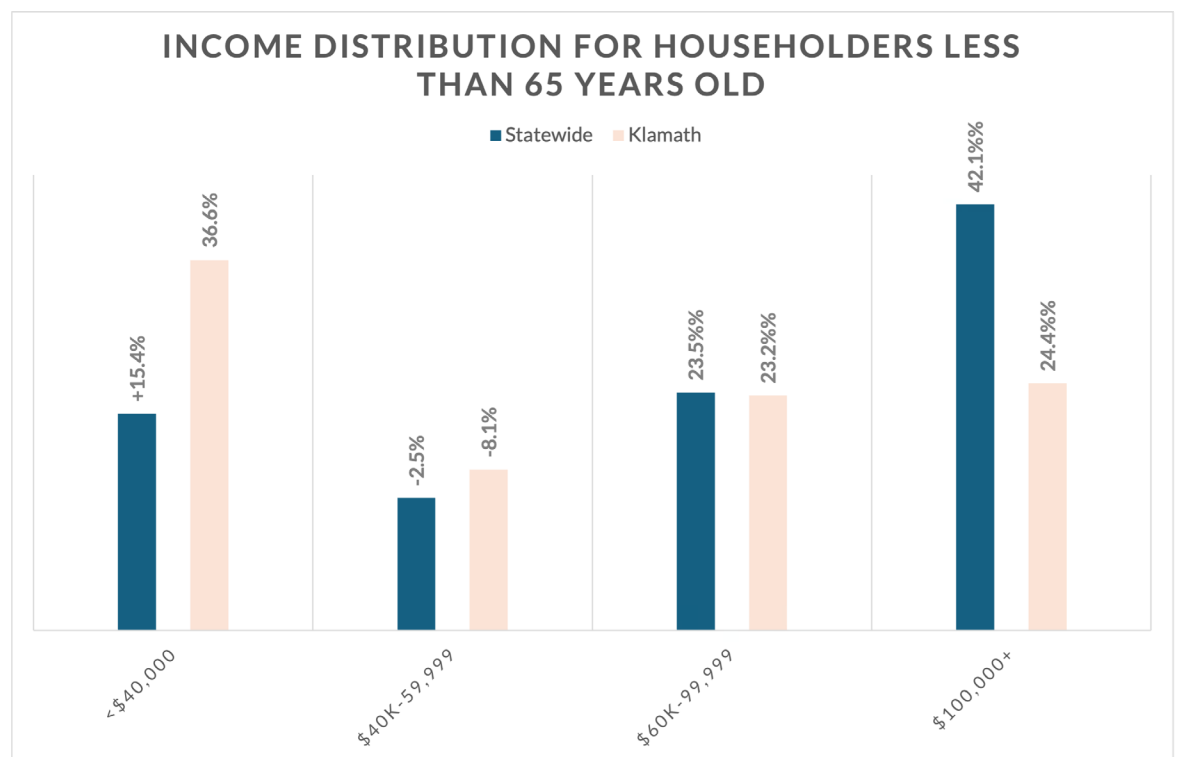


Figure 1

People live on the edge: trading, bartering, and doing under-the-table work. Using the [ALICE methodology](#), only 51% of Klamath workers are making enough to have a “survival budget,” compared to 56% of workers in other Oregon counties.

1 out of 3 households in Klamath receive some form of public assistance (Supplemental Security Income, Cash Public Assistance Income, or Food Stamps/SNAP), compared with 29% of Oregon households.

### Prime working age group

Klamath's prime working age group (25-54) population is 35.6% of the community, whereas Oregon's is 40.5%.<sup>[3]</sup>

**RESEARCHER PRO TIP:** When designing your research project, make note about whether your intended age range is represented in the community.

### Klamath County seniors

21.9% of Klamath's population is 65 and older, whereas the rest of Oregon is 19.6%.<sup>[4]</sup> Klamath's seniors experience poverty at higher rates than their peers in other counties (12.4% vs. 9.9%).<sup>[5]</sup>

In Oregon 25% of seniors (65 years and over) earn \$100,000 or more per year. Only 13% of Klamath seniors earn \$100,000 or more per year.

11.5% of seniors in Klamath earn less than \$10,000 per year, compared with 5.4% in Oregon.

The median income of Klamath seniors was \$48,365, compared with \$55,963 in Oregon.

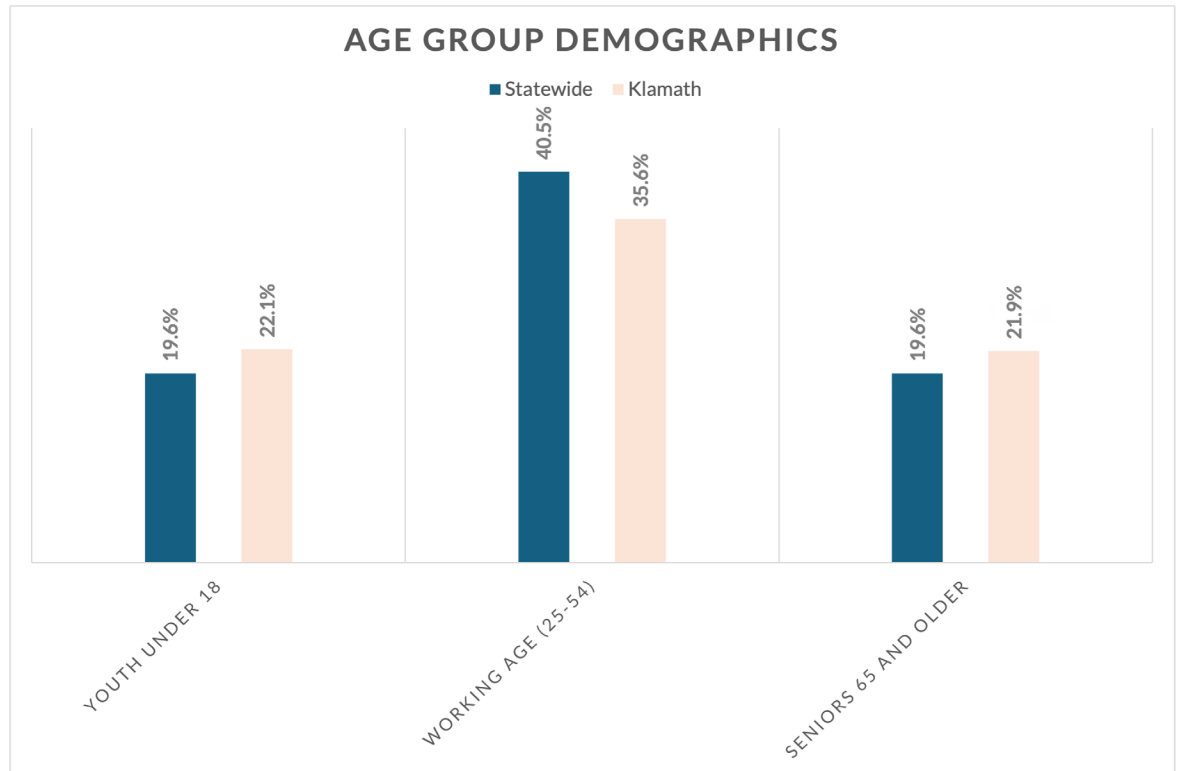


Figure 2

## Technology

Oregon Tech represents innovation in the area: hydroponics, technology, environmental research funding, and solar power. [Oregon Tech Foundation](#) supports small-scale seed projects.

Most individuals in Klamath County have smartphones. Many use pay-as-you-go phone plans, lack coverage outside the city, and not everyone has a computer or tablet at home. Public library provides access to computers and Internet.

Wi-Fi is inconsistent due to geography but has increased; Chiloquin got broadband in the late '90s, the public library provides access to computers and the Internet, and Healthy Klamath helps students access Wi-Fi.

**RESEARCHER PRO TIP:** To be inclusive of research participants, consider access to technology across the socioeconomic continuum.

## Population demographics

- Klamath County's population is 50.9% male and 49.1% female.
- 14.9% identify as Hispanic or Latino.
- 6.8% identify as AI/AN, alone or in combination with other races.
  - ◊ Of this 6.8% AI/AN group, 53% of the individuals also identify as White and choose Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. This indicates an overlap of Hispanic + AI/AN + White identification at the individual level.
  - ◊ While not demonstrated in the data, many individuals self-identify as Black-Native.
- At 73.5%, the largest demographic group is White alone, not Hispanic or Latino.
- Klamath has a large migrant farmworker population.
  - ◊ 4.5% of Klamath residents are foreign-born.
  - ◊ 90% of foreign-born, non-U.S. citizen residents are from Latin America, compared to 50% of naturalized U.S. citizens.
- High school diploma (or equivalent) is the largest cohort for educational attainment (34.3%, compared to 22.7% for Oregon).
  - ◊ Only 19.6% have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 36.3% for Oregon.

### Uncomfortable social reality

There remains a long-term undercurrent of racism toward minority racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, there is an over-representation of Tribal youth in detention. According to statewide statistics, 14% of juvenile jail admissions were AI/AN Klamath youth, compared to 2% of the state's population.

### Klamath County mothers

Klamath has a large population of young, single mothers. [Pregnancy Hope Center](#) assists young mothers and does a lot of nonprofit work. The region also experiences limited and costly childcare. The county's Community Health Improvement Projects (CHIP)-related Infant Mortality workgroup (A.K.A. Trends on Thriving) is prioritizing how to address infant mortality rate, substance abuse, nutrition and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. 10.9% of households in Klamath are female head-of-house with no spouse present, compared to Oregon's 9.9%.

Klamath County's substantiated child abuse rate is in the worst 25% for Oregon counties [6]. Much of the region's child abuse is drug or alcohol-related, both of which are problems for Klamath's teen mothers.

Klamath demonstrates the 7<sup>th</sup> highest rate of child abuse in Oregon. Klamath reported 320 victims of child abuse in 2022, a rate of 21.5 victims per 1,000 children (compared to Oregon's rate of 12.4) [7]. Most incidents involved neglect (172 cases) and threat of harm (178 cases). Only 38.5% of child abuse cases were closed at screening, the 6<sup>th</sup> lowest rate in Oregon.

Demographic data on child abuse and foster care is not available at the county level, but statewide:

- 3.9% of all child abuse incidents involve children from AI/AN communities – 2.5x the percentage you would expect given the population distribution (AI/AN children represent only 1.5% of Oregonian children).
- 4.7% of children in foster care were AI/AN – 3x higher than the distribution would predict.

DHS and Klamath Tribes work hard to respect the Indian Child Welfare Act. The law is that the Tribes are responsible for taking care of Tribal children who are being abused/neglected; DHS is secondary to Tribal child welfare law when it comes to removing children from the home or placing them elsewhere.

## Transportation is always an issue

Klamath Falls and Klamath County's built environment is vehicle-centric. Lower-income people do not have cars and those who do commonly do not have insurance or licenses.

**RESEARCHER PRO TIP:** Commit to and ensure compensation for transportation needs of research participants.

- People rely on others to attend doctor appointments or get groceries.
- Inner city bus tokens are free. Inner city buses take riders where the Tribal bus does not stop.
- There are 2 cab services.
- OHP-covered individuals can access 2-3 medical transportation services.

## Healthcare and access

In 2023, Klamath County ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> of 36 counties for both Health Outcomes and Health Measures [8]. Its overall chronic disease burden is consistently higher than state averages [9].

A Kaiser Family Foundation survey about health insurance coverage in the region found that 6% of uninsured are in the "coverage gap [10]." 25% were Medicaid eligible, 15% were ineligible due to immigration status, and 35% were eligible for tax credits.

- 54.9% of Klamath residents have some form of public health insurance (Medicaid, Medicare, or VA), alone or in combination with private insurance. This insured rate is higher than elsewhere in Oregon (41.2%), likely reflecting the lower income distribution in Klamath and higher rates of poverty (14.5% vs. Oregon's 12.1%).



- ◇ Oregon has one of the most generous Medicaid expansion programs in the country. Children in families that make up to 305% of the Federal Poverty Level are eligible, and parents or caregivers of children on Medicaid are eligible.
- ◇ Additionally, Tribal members employed by the Tribes receive commercial health insurance.
- 32.8% of Klamath residents are on public insurance alone (Medicaid, Medicare, or VA) compared to Oregon (23.8% and the U.S. (21.9%).
- Only 38.7% of Klamath residents have employer-sponsored health insurance, compared to 54.4% in Oregon and 54.8% in the U.S.
- ◇ 14% of Klamath residents purchased insurance over the Affordable Care Act (ACA) exchange, which is comparable to Oregon (14.4%) and the U.S. (13.9%).

Access to healthcare (physical, mental, oral, specialists) suffers due to lack of providers, long wait times, and distances traveled. Only one non-Tribal agency helps people sign up for OHP. According to 2022 U.S. Census Bureau data, the uninsured rate in Klamath is 11.2% compared to Oregon's 6% uninsured rate [\[11\]](#).

- The Healthcare service area of “East Klamath” has the second-lowest Healthcare Unmet Needs score in the state [\[12\]](#), reflecting an absolute lack of Primary Care, Dentistry, and Mental Health providers.
- Tribal members must use Tribally-run clinics, except in the case of an emergency. The Tribal Clinic only has an x-ray machine, so the clinic setting must refer members to other healthcare systems.

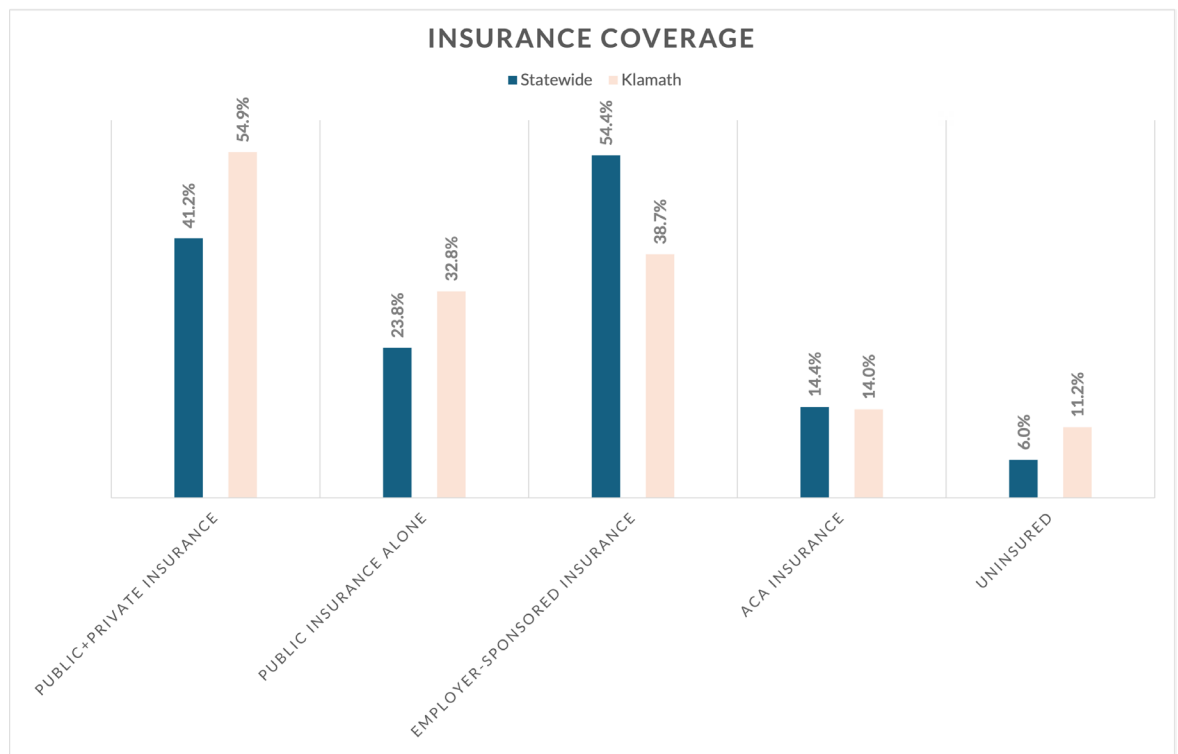


Figure 3

However, the county has very strong community partnerships in health and human services and social service agencies. Half of the students enrolled at Oregon Tech are on a healthcare track.

- Sky Lakes (non-profit): 22 clinics across the county, wellness center, offers health improvement projects (walk with a doc, pharmacy delivery services, and meal, nutrition, diabetes, and sleep training classes).
- Federally Qualified Health Centers: Klamath Open Door (medical, pharmacy, dental, and behavioral health in the same building).
- Pediatric clinics (2), allopathic/alternative clinic (1), and a number of dental clinics – the community reports there are still not enough dentists.

## Substance use

Both community and Tribal members experience drug and alcohol use problems. The public health department and Tribal Health hire caseworkers who focus on these issues and individuals. Tribal-oriented modalities to prevent substance abuse are offered, including annual New Year's Eve powwows honoring sobriety.

- Klamath residents reported the 16<sup>th</sup> highest rate of heavy alcohol use (8%) in the state, with 52.8% of residents reported currently using alcohol (21<sup>st</sup> in the state) [\[13\]](#).
- Klamath residents reported the 8<sup>th</sup> highest rate of current marijuana use (23.9%).
- 26.6% of Klamath residents reported using tobacco products, the 14<sup>th</sup> highest rate in Oregon [\[14\]](#).

## Mental health

Klamath residents reported the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest rate of depression in the state (29.3%). In 2021, there were 24 deaths by suicide – a rate of 38.5 deaths per 100,000 residents. Oregon's rate was 19.5 deaths per 100,000 residents [\[15\]](#).

- Residents 25-44 years old reported the highest suicide rate (56.4 deaths per 100,000 residents), followed by ages 45-65 (48.7 deaths per 100,000 residents), and ages 65+ (37.7 deaths per 100,000 residents).
- Although youth 10-24 years old reported the lowest suicide rate in the county (21.8 deaths per 100,000 residents), this rate is much higher than the state suicide rate for the same age group (13.6 deaths per 100,000 residents).

There are six locations that offer mental health services, three of which are operated by Sky Lakes Medical Center:

- [Klamath Tribal Health & Family Services](#) Youth and Family Guidance Center
- [Lutheran Community Services](#)
- [Klamath Basin Behavioral Health](#), which also offers residential services.
- [Sky Lakes Medical Center](#)
  - ◊ Sky Lakes Cancer Treatment Center offers cancer treatment support groups; being a patient is not required.
  - ◊ The Cascades East clinic and the Primary Care clinic offer behavioral health services to clinic patients

## Cancer

Incidence rates (all data 5-year age-adjusted rates; 2018-2022):

- Klamath has the 7<sup>th</sup> highest incidence rate for all cancer disease sites.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> highest incidence rate for colorectal cancer.
- 4<sup>th</sup> highest incidence rate for uterine cancer (women only).
- 5<sup>th</sup> highest incidence rate for bladder cancer.
- 6<sup>th</sup> highest incidence rate for liver cancer.

Mortality rates (all data 5-year age-adjusted rates; 2018-2022):

- Klamath has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest mortality rate for all cancer disease sites.
- 4<sup>th</sup> highest mortality rate for breast cancer (women only).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> highest mortality rate for uterine cancer (women only).
- 5<sup>th</sup> highest mortality rate for leukemia.
- 4<sup>th</sup> highest mortality rate for liver cancer.
- 4<sup>th</sup> highest mortality rate for melanoma.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> highest mortality rate for prostate cancer (men only).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> highest mortality rate for bladder cancer.

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