



**What is the Oregon ALE Savings Plan?** In 2014, Congress passed the Stephen Beck Jr., Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, or ALE Act, that allowed states to create savings plans for people with disabilities. Launched in December 2016, the Oregon ALE Savings Plan and the national ALE for ALL Savings Plan were established to enable people with disabilities and their families to achieve financial security without losing their critical means-tested benefits.

**Measuring Success** 2019 marked a milestone for the Oregon ALE and ALE for ALL programs—\$17 million saved and more than 3,000 funded accounts. Although still in its infancy, the program’s average account size is now more than \$5,500 and over \$9 million has been contributed to ALE accounts in 2019 alone.

The power of ALE goes beyond offering a simple savings vehicle to the disability community; accounts effectively function as empowerment tools, allowing participants the independence to take control of their financial future. Oregon ALE was the first national program to successfully implement key legislative changes in 2018, allowing for employed account owners to save more than the annual contribution limit and to roll over money saved in a 529 college savings account into ALE accounts without penalties. Over the past year, Oregon ALE staff have presented or exhibited at 92 events prioritizing visits to rural communities, and Southern and Eastern Oregon. Oregon ALE now has account owners in all but three counties.

**Voices** Personal ALE stories.



*"If someone without a disability has the right to save up money and get married and buy houses or whatever they need, then people with disabilities should be able to do the same. It's kind of shame that it took the ALE savings program to create a method to save without impacting our benefits, but hopefully a lot of people learn of it and start taking advantage of it," said Joseph Lowe.*

Joseph Lowe is a Sandy, Ore. resident with arthrogryposis, a condition that limits movement in his joints. He put some of his ALE savings towards his wedding and is now saving for a house.

Ashlynn’s ALE account offers a prepaid card, and Langford can load money onto it so that Ashlynn can pay for things herself when she goes out, like her friends do. She can also save for larger expenses, such as a cell phone.

An Oregon ALE account has made a big difference for Ashlynn Rutherford of Milwaukie, Ore. She experiences quadriplegic cerebral palsy and epilepsy and receives SSI benefits and help from other programs that impose a \$2,000 asset limit. Her younger sister would get birthday and Christmas gifts and put them in a bank account, but Ashlynn couldn’t save her money.

*"Before I had ALE, if I had money for my birthday, I had to put it in my wallet."*

*"It [ALE] has been teaching Ashlynn money management and independence and life skills," says her mother, Alisha Langford. "This allows her to save her own money, and it's empowering."*



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**Eligibility** ABLE accounts are open to people diagnosed with a disability before the age of 26. To be eligible, one of the following must also be true. The beneficiary:

- Is eligible for SSI or SSDI because of a disability (even if they don't receive the benefit);
- Experiences blindness as determined by the Social Security Act; OR
- Can produce a signed diagnosis form by a licensed physician.

**How it works** A person with a disability or an authorized legal representative can open an account. The money in an ABLE account belongs to the person with the disability. Anyone can contribute to an account, but no more than \$15,000 can be deposited into an account each year. Individuals can save up to \$100,000 before it starts counting against their SSI benefits. No other benefits are affected regardless of the amount saved. The total account limit is \$400,000.

Money can be saved in an FDIC-insured cash option (similar to a checking or savings account) or invested conservatively, moderately or aggressively. Prepaid cards are available so that individuals can swipe a card at check out as payment.

Money must be spent on a qualified disability-related expense. Expenses include education, housing, basic living expenses, transportation, job training and support, assistive technology, personal support services, financial management, administrative services, legal fees, oversight and monitoring, funeral and burial costs, health, prevention and wellness, and more.

**Benefits** Money deposited into an ABLE account does not count against the asset limit for means-tested benefits, including SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, HUD Assistance and others. Growth within an account is tax-free. Anyone contributing to an Oregon ABLE Savings Plan can also receive a state income tax credit up to \$300 for joint filers and \$150 for single filers.

**ABLE Matters** serving the disability community.

*"Pursuit of whole lives is at the heart of our work at FACT Oregon as we encourage families to dream big dreams for their child experiencing disability," said Roberta Dunn, executive director for FACT Oregon. "The availability of Oregon ABLE Savings Accounts have begun to bust the myth that our young adults must live austere lives of unemployment or underemployment in order to maintain access to critical services. With the Oregon ABLE Savings Plan, families can keep their focus on whole, full colorful lives that include employment."*

*"Without ABLE accounts, we are asking people who experience disability to stay in poverty or lose the supports and services they need to survive," said Tobi Burch Rates, executive director of the Autism Society of Oregon. "From a parent's point of view, the idea that after I'm dead and gone, that my son would not have money in his own name for emergencies or even to cover basic living expenses is terrifying. The choice between accumulating no more than \$2,000 or losing benefits is a ridiculous choice. ABLE gives self-determination to anyone who experiences a disability. It gives them the opportunity to live a fuller life."*

*"The Oregon ABLE Savings Plan provides individuals with disabilities—including disabled veterans—the opportunity to grow and sustain financial assets without jeopardizing access to much-needed public benefits," said Kelly Fitzpatrick, director of the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. "However, many, if not most, veterans do not have their disability diagnosed until well after the age of 26. Increasing the ABLE Savings Plan age to 46 will help older disabled veterans obtain economic stability at a point in their lives when they most need it."*

