

# THE GOVERNOR'S INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HEALTH DISPARITIES

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**State Policy Action Plan to Eliminate Health Disparities**

January 2020



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Equity Office Task Force .....	2
Equitable Reproductive Health Access .....	4
Health Impact Reviews .....	4
Environmental Justice Task Force .....	6
Council Membership .....	8



## INTRODUCTION

The Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities (Council) is charged with creating a state policy action plan to eliminate health inequities by race/ethnicity and gender. This report outlines strategies to address health inequities by: (1) recommending the passage of legislation to create and fund a Washington State Office of Equity, (2) reiterating the recommendations from the Council's Literature Review on Inequities in Reproductive Health Access, and (3) recommending the continued support and use of Health Impact Reviews to promote health and equity in legislative decision making. In addition, this report includes an update on the work of the Environmental Justice Task Force, which the Council was directed to convene through a proviso in the 2019-2020 biennial operating budget.

The recommendations in this report, including those the Council is endorsing from other reports, focus on the social determinants of health and root causes of health inequities. By focusing upstream on these determinants of health, the Council believes its recommendations will ultimately work to reduce inequities for all health outcomes, including those listed in its authorizing statute (RCW 43.20.280).



Above: Office of Equity Task Force members. Back row, l-r: RaShelle Davis, Rep. Melanie Morgan, Maria Siguenza, Allison Spector, Karen Johnson, Mandeep Kaundal. Middle row, l-r: Sen. Manka Dhingra, Michelle Gonzalez, Toshiko Hasegawa, Mystique Hurtado. Front row, l-r: Benjamin Danielson, Jan Ward Olmstead. Full list of members available on page 3.



Closing circle at the Council's Everett Community Forum on Sept. 5, 2019

## EQUITY OFFICE TASK FORCE

The Legislature directed the Council to convene and staff an Equity Office Task Force through a proviso in the 2019-2021 operating budget (Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1109, Section 221, subsection 7).

The Task Force is charged with developing a proposal for the creation of a Washington State Office of Equity, submitting a preliminary report to the Governor and the Legislature by December 15, 2019, and submitting a final proposal by July 1, 2020.

The Task Force is directed to include the following recommendations in its final proposal:

1. A mission statement and vision statement for the office;
2. A definition of “equity,” which must be used by the office to guide its work;
3. The organizational structure of the office, which must include a community liaison for the office;
4. A plan to engage executive-level management from all agencies;
5. Mechanisms for facilitating state policy and systems change to promote equity, promoting community outreach and engagement, and establishing standards for the collection, analysis, and reporting of disaggregated data regarding race and ethnicity;
6. Mechanisms for accountability to ensure that performance measures around equity are met across all agencies, including recommendations on audits of agencies and other accountability tools as deemed appropriate; and,
7. A budget proposal including estimates for costs and staffing.

The Task Force convened for its first meeting on August 19 in Tacoma with subsequent meetings in Vancouver on September 16, Yakima on October 21, Tumwater on November 25, and Olympia on December 16. The Task Force has been intentional in creating opportunities to listen, learn, and seek input from communities impacted by inequity to guide its work, including

both government-to-government engagement with tribes as sovereign nations and more general community engagement.

Specific engagement activities have included hosting community forums in Everett on September 5 and in Yakima on October 20, administering an online survey that had 214 responses, and employing a community engagement coordinator position to share information directly with communities across the state and seek input to guide the Task Force’s work.

In addition, the Task Force staff met with leaders of the Yakama Nation prior to its public meeting in Yakima and members and staff attended the 30th Annual Centennial Accord meeting on November 6-7 to learn about tribes’ priorities and speak to tribal leaders about the Task Force’s work.

To inform the development of its recommendations, the Task Force sought community input, explored existing efforts and infrastructure in the state related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and looked at model equity initiatives undertaken by government jurisdictions in the state and nationally.

The Task Force’s December 2019 Preliminary Report to the Governor and the Legislature is expected to inform legislation for the upcoming 2020 legislative session to create a Washington State Office of Equity.

### RECOMMENDATION 1:

The Council recommends the passage of legislation to create and fund a Washington State Office of Equity.

Responsible Party: Legislature  
Measure: Passage of Legislation  
Timeline: 2020

**Table 1 - Equity Office Task Force Membership**

Governor’s Interagency Council on Health Disparities	Benjamin Danielson (co-chair), Jan Olmstead (co-chair)
Legislators *	Sen. Manka Dhingr, Rep. Mia Gregerson (alternate)
* One legislator seat, to be appointed by the President of the Senate, remains vacant.	Rep. Jeremie Dufault, Alec Regimbal (alternate)
	Rep. Melanie Morgan
Office of the Governor	RaShelle Davis
Commission of African American Affairs	Ed Prince
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council	Karen A. Johnson
Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs	Toshiko Hasegawa, Carrie Huie Pascua (alternate)
Human Rights Commission	Sharon Ortiz
Commission on Hispanic Affairs	Maria Siguenza
WA State Women’s Commission	Michelle Gonzalez, Marie Vela (alternate)
Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs	Craig Bill, Mystique Hurtado (alternate)
Office of Minority and Womens’ Business Enterprises	Lisa van der Lugt
	Rex Brown (alternate), Dawn Rains (alternate)
Disability Community	Elizabeth Gordon, Mandeep Kaundal (alternate)
LGBTQ+ Community	Allison Spector

## EQUITABLE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ACCESS

In 2018, the Washington State Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill 6219 (SSB 6219). The bill directed the Council to conduct a literature review on disparities in access to reproductive healthcare in Washington State and to propose recommendations to reduce those disparities.

Council staff conducted a review of literature between April and August 2018 to identify barriers to accessing reproductive healthcare. Barriers served as a means to understand disparities in access in order to provide greater understanding of the potential root causes of disparities and to develop relevant, specific recommendations. Staff completed key informant interviews to gain additional context and background information and to refine staff understanding of the literature and recommendations for some population groups.

Council staff evaluated recommendations identified in the literature as well as reports from Washington State agencies and community-based organizations addressing reproductive health. Recommendations that could be addressed at the state level were then further evaluated to determine if they could be acted on by the Washington State Legislature or a state agency.

In January 2019, the Council submitted its report, *Literature Review on Inequities in Reproductive Health Access*, which identified 14 populations experiencing inequities, 45 unique barriers to access, and 14 recommendations to improve access in the areas of criminal justice, education, healthcare providers, health insurance, and state funding.

### RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Council reaffirms the recommendations submitted in its January 2019, *Literature Review on Inequities in Reproductive Health Access*.

Responsible Parties: Various (see recommendations)

Measure: To be determined

Timeline: To be determined

## HEALTH IMPACT REVIEWS

RCW 43.20.285 authorizes the State Board of Health (Board) in collaboration with the Council to conduct Health Impact Reviews (HIRs). HIRs are objective, non-partisan, evidence-based analyses that provides the Governor and Legislators with information about how legislative proposals may impact health and health equity in Washington State.

Since 2014, Council staff have completed 81 HIRs at the request of 48 different legislators. Staff have completed requests on a range of policy topics including, behavioral health, education, and criminal justice, to name just a few. HIRs rely primarily on evidence published in the scientific literature. However, additional staff capacity has allowed staff to complete key informant interviews to address gaps in published literature and to better understand how legislative proposals may impact people in Washington State, which has been of particular interest to the Council.

The Board currently employs 1.6 FTE to complete HIRs. The additional capacity (0.6 FTE) was included in the Board's budget during the last biennium through Foundational Public Health Services. The added capacity will allow the Board and Council to conduct more HIRs, thereby improving the state's ability to use evidence to inform policy and to promote health and health equity.

## HEALTH IMPACT REVIEWS (CON'TD)

In addition to providing legislators with information on specific proposals, HIR findings have been used to inform related policy work. For example, in fiscal year 2019, analysts completed an interim request on ESSB 5395, concerning comprehensive sexual health education. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction requested Council staff provide a briefing on the HIR findings to the legislatively mandated Sexual Health Education Workgroup (ESHB 1109 Section 501 [3][h]). Specifically, the group was tasked with considering the merits and challenges associated with requiring all schools to offer comprehensive sexual health education to students in all grades. Workgroup members were particularly interested in the HIR finding that inclusive comprehensive sexual health curriculum has the potential to reduce health inequities for multiple student groups.

Similarly, in fiscal year 2019, analysts completed a request on HB 1932, concerning vapor products. The analysis focused on provisions which would ban the sale of flavored vapor products in Washington State. Overall, the HIR found evidence that banning the sale of flavored vapor products would likely decrease initiation and use of vapor products and other tobacco products among youth and young adults, thereby improving health outcomes. The review could not conclude how the bill would impact health inequities. Shortly after analysts began conducting the review, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that, in collaboration with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, state and local health departments, and other clinical and public health partners, it was investigating outbreaks of severe lung injury associated with e-cigarette and vapor products.

Results of the HIR were used in the state's response to the outbreak of severe lung injury associated with vaping products. On September 27, 2019 Governor Jay Inslee issued Executive Order 19-03, addressing the Vaping Use Public Health Crisis. As a part of the Executive Order, Governor Inslee directed the Washington State Department of Health to, "request that the State Board of Health use its emergency rulemaking authority to impose a ban on all flavored vapor products, including flavored THC vapor products". At the Board's October 9 meeting, staff briefed the Board on the

HIR findings for HB 1932. The Board adopted the emergency rulemaking order to create chapter 246-80 WAC, Vapor Products and Flavors rule. Among its provisions, the emergency rule bans the sale of flavored vapor products, including flavored THC vapor products. The emergency rule went into effect on October 10, 2019 and will be in effect for 120 days.

The understanding of HIRs as a policy tool and ways in which requesters use findings continue to develop. While legislators initially requested HIRs primarily to support policies that may positively impact health and health equity, legislators are more frequently requesting HIRs on proposed legislation to understand potential unintended consequences. Other requesters have also used HIRs to understand whether a bill would have the intended impact. Requesters have used findings from HIRs to adjust their proposals to eliminate or address potential concerns.

Requesters have indicated that HIRs are important for informing legislative decision-making by providing important information to talk with other legislators, delivering unbiased data and information, and giving weight and credibility to proposals. Consequently, the demand for HIRs continues to grow and surpass staff capacity.

### RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Council recommends that legislators and the Governor continue to support and make requests for Health Impact Reviews to ensure legislative policy development promotes health and equity for all Washingtonians.

Responsible Party: Legislature, Governor, State Board of Health  
Measure: Number of requested and completed HIRs per fiscal year  
Timeline: Ongoing

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

Section 221, subsection 48 of the 2019-2021 biennial operating budget (Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 1109) directed the Council to convene and staff an Environmental Justice Task Force. The Task Force is responsible for recommending strategies to incorporate environmental justice principles into future state agency actions. The task force must submit a final report by October 31, 2020 to include:

1. Guidance for using the Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map, hosted on the Department of Health's website to identify communities that are highly impacted by environmental justice issues with current demographic data.
2. Best practices for increasing meaningful and inclusive community engagement that takes into account barriers to participation.
3. Measurable goals for reducing environmental health disparities for each community in Washington state and ways in which state agencies may focus their work towards meeting those goals.
4. Model policies that prioritize highly impacted communities and vulnerable populations for the purpose of reducing environmental health disparities and advancing a healthy environment for all residents.

The Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental justice as, "...the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."<sup>1</sup>

Environmental justice is one important outcome of a truly equitable society and is a critical part of the work to eliminate health disparities. To date, the Environmental Justice Task Force has held two meetings, one in

Lakewood on September 30 and the other in Yakima on November 21. In 2020, the Task Force will meet in Vancouver on January 14 and in Spokane on April 2. Future meeting location and dates for the spring and summer of 2020 are forthcoming.

The Task Force is supported by two subcommittees that will meet monthly. The Task Force, as well as each subcommittee, has its own set of objectives and timeline to address the four required outcomes for the final report.

One subcommittee will focus on providing guidance to state agencies for how to use the Washington Environmental Health Disparities map and the other subcommittee will provide recommendations for best practices for meaningful community engagement.

The Task Force and its subcommittees will also recommend measurable goals and model policies that prioritize environmental justice in the state. Task Force membership is included in Table 2 on the following page.



Office of Equity Task Force and Environmental Justice Task Force staff.  
From l-r: Esmael Lopez, LinhPhung Huynh, Elise Rasmussen, Hannah Fernald

<sup>1</sup>Accessed at: [EPA web page online](#) on 11/24/2019

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE (CONT'D)

**Table 2 - Environmental Justice Task Force Membership**

Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities	Victor Rodriguez (co-chair)
Statewide Environmental Justice Issues	David Mendoza (co-chair)
Puget Sound Partnership	Larry Epstein, Leah Kintner (alternate)
Department of Transportation	Allison Camden, Megan White (alternate)
Public Lands (Dept. of Natural Resources)	Cassie Bordelon
Department of Health	Laura Johnson
Department of Commerce	Michael Furze, Sarah Vorpahl (alternate)
Department of Agriculture	Ignacio Marquez
Department of Ecology	Millie Piazza
CBO: Tacoma League of Young Professionals	Emily Pinckney
Union/Organized Labor Association: UAW Local 4121	Judy Twedt
CBO: Community to Community Development	Tomás Madrigal
CBO: Asian Pacific Islander Coalition	Rowena Pineda
Statewide Agricultural Interests: WA State Farm Bureau	John Stuhlmiller
Business Interests: Association of WA Business	Gary Chandler, Peter Godlewski (alternate)
Tribal Leader	Unconfirmed

## COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

The Council has 17 members: a chair appointed by the Governor; representatives of 14 state agencies, boards, and commissions; and two members of the public who represent health care consumers. A list of current Council members is provided below. The interagency structure of the Council allows it to have a statewide and broad approach to addressing health disparities. The Council considers not only health and health care issues, but also the social factors that influence health, such as education, poverty, employment, and the environment.

**Table 3 - Governor’s Interagency Council on Health Disparities Membership**

Governor’s Representative and Council Chair	Benjamin Danielson
Consumer Representative and Council Vice Chair	Victor Rodriguez
Consumer Representative	Leah Wainman
Commission on African American Affairs	Sara Franklin-Phillips
Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs	Lydia Faitalia
Commission on Hispanic Affairs	Anita Ahumada, Diana Lindner (alternate)
Department of Agriculture	Jill Wisehart
Department of Commerce	Diane Klontz
American Indian Health Commission <sup>2</sup>	Willie Frank, Jan Ward Olmstead (alternate)
Department of Children, Youth, and Families	Greg Williamson
Department of Ecology	Millie Piazza, Rian Sallee (alternate)
Department of Health	Paj Nandi
Department of Social and Health Services	Marietta Bobba
Health Care Authority	Jessie Dean , Lena Nachand (alternate)
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	Haley Lowe
State Board of Health	Stephen Kutz, Michelle Davis (alternate)
Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board	Liz Coleman

<sup>2</sup> The Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs delegated authority to the American Indian Health Commission to appoint a representative to the Council

striving to eliminate health disparities by race/ethnicity and gender in washington state

