

BEFORE THE BOARD OF HEALTH
SPOKANE REGIONAL HEALTH DISTRICT

RESOLUTION #24-12

RE: ADOPTING A BOARD OF HEALTH LEGISLATIVE AGENDA FOR THE 2025 STATE OF WASHINGTON LEGISLATIVE SESSION

WHEREAS, according to its governance responsibilities, the Board of Health of Spokane Regional Health District leads and contributes to the development of policies that protect, promote, and improve public health and health equity; and

WHEREAS, according to its governance responsibilities, the Board of Health of Spokane Regional Health District ensures the availability of adequate resources to perform essential public health services; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Health of Spokane Regional Health District has duly considered and prioritized matters of public policy and budget in the interests of public health and the sustainability of the activities of Spokane Regional Health District; and

WHEREAS, the Washington State Legislature has the authority to enact statewide legislation to protect, promote and improve public health and enact funding to support the public health system;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF HEALTH, that the attached Board of Health Legislative Agenda for the 2025 state legislative session is adopted, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Spokane Regional Health District's Board of Health calls upon the Washington State Legislature to consider this legislative agenda as it works to enact legislation and budgets in the interests of public health, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the attached Board of Health Legislative Agenda for the 2025 state legislative session shall be effective immediately upon adoption.

Signed this 5th day of December 2024 in Spokane, Washington.

SPOKANE REGIONAL HEALTH DISTRICT
BOARD OF HEALTH


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COMMISSIONER AMBER WALDREF, VICE CHAIR


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BOARD MEMBER CHARLIE DURANONA


BOARD MEMBER PATRICIA KIENHOLZ

BOARD OF HEALTH

Legislative Agenda



Introduction

The Spokane Regional Health District's Board of Health finds great agreement with the legislative priorities of its partner organizations like Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials and the Washington State Public Health Association. These groups have already identified critical high-level needs of our organization and others like us. Some of these priorities include:



- Supporting state and local public health funding through the State General Fund
- Improving definitions under Adult and Pediatric review regarding mandated reporting and expanding to social workers
- Protecting districts by improved funding for safe and reliable drinking water and environmentally responsible wastewater collection and treatment
- Support for policies that increase equitable access and training opportunities for mental health services to address the wide range of mental health related issues in our community
- Supporting private well owners to address toxins in our community environment
- Supporting policies that increase education on informed consent related to medical procedures and vaccines
- Increased funding support for primary care medical residency programs
- Supporting agencies to respond, treat, and provide resources, as well as social and health services, to address the needs of vulnerable older and disabled adults
- Supporting the reduction of the administrative burden associated with duplicate documentation for healthcare delivery and barriers to care access

While Spokane Regional Health District's Board of Health finds all these policies to be an urgent priority, we also recognize that our health district has policy and finance needs that are unique to our district. We have worked with experts and leaders from each of our programs to identify more specific legislative needs that the State Legislature should act on. These priorities are listed on the next page.

Current Legislative Agenda



Community Wellbeing and Resilience

- Mandated reporting clarification - better definition under Adult and Pediatric Review regarding mandated reporting and expanding to social workers
- Increased funding for Districts to provide safe and reliable drinking water and environmentally responsible wastewater collection and treatment
- Supporting private well owners to address toxins in our community environment
- Increased funding support for primary care medical residency programs
- Increased support for youth mental health and psychiatric support



Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery

- Increased promotion of training opportunities for health care and behavioral health providers around medication-assisted treatment and substance use disorder
- Support and access to training for evidence-based interventions for preventing substance use disorders in adolescents



Administration

- Supporting the reduction of the administrative burden associated with duplicate documentation for healthcare delivery and barriers to care access



Equity

- Support for policies that increase education on informed consent related to medical procedures and vaccines and Portable Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST)
- Ensuring all information is translated into the local community languages and appropriate interpreter services are provided for all

Policy Context & Rationale



Community Wellbeing and Resilience

Our community benefits from supporting families and children by providing access to healthy and safe relationships and environments which promote positive childhood experiences. Spokane Regional Health District supports strategies that prevent and reduce the impact of early childhood adverse experiences by strengthening community resilience. Supporting policies that increase family resilience, such as universal access to parental leave, quality early education programs and financial stability for all families will ensure a strong safety net for Spokane County families and children.

Mandated reporting clarification - better definition under Adult and Pediatric Review regarding mandated reporting and expanding to social service workers

Mandatory reporting is a valuable tool in assuring that vulnerable adults and children who may be victims of abuse receive help and intervention. The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 26.44.030 outlines the duty to report and the duty to notify the proper authorities. Those who have this duty include health care workers (those licensed or certified in Washington State under Title 18 RCW) and social services counselors.

Mandated reporting is a legal requirement for certain professionals when they suspect child and adult abuse or neglect, oftentimes, social service workers are doing the mandated reporting. However, Washington state does not have an official definition of a social service counselor. SRHD supports improved clarification for this reporting requirement.

Support for improving funding for water districts to provide safe and reliable drinking water and environmentally responsible wastewater collection and treatment

In April 2024, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued the first-ever national, legally enforceable drinking water standard to protect communities from exposure to harmful per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). While funding was distributed to states across the nation, private well owners in Washington state are struggling to ensure safe drinking water in their own homes, for their children, gardens, and livestock. Additionally, further discovery of PFAS in areas previously determined safe has left the

community mistrusting the safety and quality of water. Testing for these chemicals can cost between \$300- \$600 per well. This is an added and undue burden for families in communities across Washington state.

Improving funding for safe drinking water and wastewater collection and treatment can have many benefits, including:

- **Public health:** Safe drinking water is essential for protecting public health.
- **Environmental protection:** Properly treated wastewater helps prevent disease and protect the environment.
- **Economic stability:** Improved water infrastructure can drive economic growth and stability.
- **Water quality:** Improved wastewater treatment can improve water quality, which can benefit local agriculture and ecosystems.
- **Water conservation:** Improving water efficiency can reduce the need for new water supplies and infrastructure and leave more water for future use.
- **Water quality in aquatic habitats:** Improving water quality through the use of new technology.
- **Job creation:** The Economic Development Administration's Public Works Program can help communities upgrade their water and wastewater facilities, which can create jobs.

Support for agencies to respond, treat, and provide resources, as well as social and health services, to address the needs of vulnerable older and disabled adults

Supporting agencies that address the needs of vulnerable older and disabled adults is crucial because it allows for the provision of essential healthcare, social services, and resources that can significantly improve their quality of life, prevent further decline, and enable them to live independently in their communities, while mitigating potential risks like isolation, neglect, and abuse. We would essentially be safeguarding their well-being and dignity.

By 2030, more than one in five Washingtonians will be 65 or older. Washington state's older adult population is expected to reach 1,984,800 by 2040, representing 22% of the state's total population. Older and disabled adults often have multifaceted needs, including medical care, assistance with daily living activities, mental health

support, and social interaction, which require coordinated services from various agencies.

Early intervention and access to appropriate services can help prevent further decline in health and functional abilities, allowing individuals to remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible. Many older and disabled adults experience social isolation, which can negatively impact their mental health. Agencies can provide companionship, support groups, and community engagement opportunities to combat this issue.

Support increased funding support for primary care medical residency programs

Primary care is the backbone of our healthcare system, yet Spokane and Washington state are facing increased challenges with further reductions in local primary care residency slots. This is especially concerning given the national shortage of primary care physicians, which is projected to worsen.

To address these shortages, the State of Washington must increase funding for primary care residency programs here in our community to ensure expanded access and availability of healthcare across the region.

Primary care is an essential part of the healthcare system, and there are many reasons why more support for primary care resident slots is needed. The Association of American Medical Colleges projects a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2033, including a shortage of primary care physicians. Caps on Medicare-funded residency slots have created imbalances that favor lower-cost and higher-reimbursement specialties, rather than primary care. The Affordable Care Act established the Teaching Healthcare Program (THC) to support new and expanded community-based primary care residency programs.

The State of Washington can increase support for primary care residencies by providing additional funding for residency programs and require that a percentage of new residency slots go to programs that train residents in rural

areas. Further, collecting health workforce data is crucial to identify underserved populations and target funding for loan repayment and scholarships as well as specialized training tracks. Washington can use this data collection to identify areas that would benefit from relaxing the caps on Medicare-funded residency positions in health care shortage areas. Washington could further this support by facilitating and participating in new and existing residency programs while using telehealth and mobile clinics to improve access to care in rural and underserved communities.

Increased support for youth mental health and psychiatric services

Spokane and other regions in Washington state are grappling with a severe shortage of child and adolescent psychiatric services. This comes at a time when youth mental health crises are escalating, placing greater strain on the healthcare system. The State of Washington must take decisive action to ensure comprehensive support for youth mental health. This should include funding the integration of pediatric mental health services into primary care settings, expanding Medicaid and commercial coverage for these services, and ensuring in-patient mental health care for youth is both available and accessible in our local community. By acting swiftly, Washington can lessen the impact of mental health facility closures and tackle the youth mental health crisis head-on.

Support for the promotion of social and emotional learning and the incorporation of social and emotional learning into classroom curriculum and management is necessary. Focused mental health support for at-risk youth is critical because it can help protect against negative outcomes and promote wellbeing. The benefits of mental health support include improved coping skills and improved self-esteem, while reducing depression and anxiety.



Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery

Substance use is a complex and challenging issue. On average, more youth and adults in Spokane County report drug use than the overall state average, putting too many community members at risk of substance use disorder, overdose, incarceration, and other negative outcomes. Research suggests that every dollar spent on substance use disorder treatment saves \$4 in healthcare costs and \$7 in criminal justice costs. SRHD can provide scientific evidence supporting strategies that promote equitable approaches to prevent substance misuse and that support individuals with substance use disorder in receiving appropriate care rather than policies that criminalize individuals with substance use disorders. The following is an expanded explanation of the policies and funding requests we advocate for on this front.

Continued and enhanced support for training for health care providers regarding substance use disorders and medications for treatment

Support training for health care providers on substance use disorders (SUDs) and treatment medications is important for several reasons. Training can help health care providers better detect, assess, refer, treat, and manage patients with SUD. Training can help ensure that people with addiction receive the treatment they need. Training can also help address the overdose epidemic by expanding the number of clinicians who are trained to prescribe buprenorphine.

Training can help health care providers be alert for adverse drug reactions, such as co-prescribing drugs with similar effects or drug overdoses. Further, training can help health care providers address co-occurring psychiatric conditions and infectious diseases and improve quality of care.

Support for training at all levels of health care, including primary care, specialty treatment, and prevention and recovery is necessary. It should also be included in post-graduate training programs, board certification, and continuing education requirements.

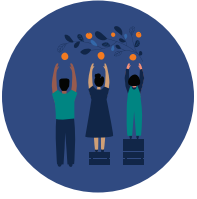
Doing so would help debunk misinformation and decrease the negative stigma that individuals face around SUD and help inform providers on proper care for those seeking treatment. Currently, many seeking this kind of help are not properly treated by physicians and hospitals. This work would ensure people get the most up-to-date treatment methods for their recovery efforts.

Support and access to training for evidence-based interventions for preventing substance use disorders in adolescents

SRHD supports the promotion of substance use prevention, management, and recovery education for all interested community members, to include family members of those with substance use issues. Support and access to training for evidence-based interventions (EBIs) for preventing substance use disorders in adolescents is important in Washington State.

- EBIs can prevent substance misuse from starting and can delay the progression to problematic use or addiction.
- Positive outcomes: EBIs can produce multiple positive outcomes, including improved academic performance and reduced violent behaviors.
- Cost-effective: EBIs can have a benefit of more than \$58 for every dollar spent.
- Reduced harm: EBIs can reduce the burden of disease and related costs.
- Improved quality of life: EBIs can lead to a higher quality of life for young people.
- Reduced long-term treatment costs: EBIs can lead to lower long-term treatment costs.
- Reduced premature mortality: EBIs can lead to less premature mortality.

EBIs can come in the form of youth-focused programs that teach parents effective ways to communicate, monitor, and enforce family rules. Early intervention EBIs provide schools, primary care providers, and mental health clinics tools to help reduce the harms of substance misuse. Examples of substance use prevention programs include Project SUCCESS and Project Towards No Drug Abuse (TND) designed for high school and high-risk youth in alternative schools.



Equity

The importance of health equity and its effects on health outcomes are the foundations of a major update to the 10 Essential Public Health Services.

SRHD recognizes that some community members have been disproportionately impacted by these inequities. We urge every sector of society to immediately take steps to address, fund, and support areas that strategically reduce the long-term impact of social determinants of health and their influence on the health of at-risk communities. Health disparities reflect both gaps in care quality and broader patterns of injustice. SRHD supports policies that remove barriers and provide support and opportunities to increase access to basic, essential determinants of health for all people, regardless of race, age, gender, religion, ability, national origin, or sexual orientation. Further explanation of the equitable policies we support for is as follows:

Support for policies that increase education on informed consent related to medical procedures and vaccines and Portable Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment (POLST)

Informed consent is a way to build trust between patients and healthcare providers. When patients are informed about the risks of vaccines, it shows that the provider cares about their health and respects their autonomy. Informing the public about vaccine risks and contraindications can help reduce injuries related to vaccines.

Informed consent allows patients to receive information and ask questions about recommended treatments, which can lead to shared decision making. Informed consent codes and laws protect both patients and caregivers. They help prevent misunderstandings and lapses in communication. Increasing education on informed consent helps maintain public trust in health authorities.

Translation services for educating people about POLST are important for many reasons, including patient safety, continuity of care, end of life care, and improved patient-provider relationships. POLST is a collaborative process that involves discussions between patients and their healthcare professionals about their wishes for treatment

in a crisis. These discussions include risks, benefits, and potential outcomes. The goal is to create a set of portable medical orders that reflect the patient's goals for care. Misinterpretations of POLST can lead to patient safety issues, such as undertreatment or overtreatment. POLST orders help ensure that a patient's care plan is consistent across different healthcare settings.

POLST helps patients define their end-of-life care decisions, which can help ensure their wishes are honored. Patient education can improve outcomes and reduce readmissions. Good quality educational materials can help improve the relationship between patients and healthcare professionals.

Ensuring all information is translated into the local community languages and appropriate interpreter services are provided for all

While the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) currently provides translated materials for several languages, we still lack critical translated materials for several communities in Spokane. Specifically, Spokane County has large Afghan, Ukrainian, Russian, and Marshallese communities which we struggle to find translated materials for and often must create our own. It is critical to provide translated materials in as many local community languages as possible for the many diverse communities across the state.

The Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services Standards developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommend providing services and materials in languages spoken by at least 5% of the population or 1,000 people, whichever is less. DOH's Language Access Plan identifies the need to translate materials into 37 languages, including languages commonly spoken in Spokane County. Increased access to materials which reflect the primary language of Spokane community members is vital for providing health information in an equitable way. Increased access will also increase health literacy and knowledge within these communities, while decreasing barriers to health information.



Administration

Supporting the reduction of administrative burden associated with healthcare delivery and barriers to care access

Currently, both private and public health administrative staff spend an excessive amount of time entering the same information for a single client multiple times, through multiple systems and state partners. Staff are reentering the same data no less than five times per client. Furthermore, this repetitive data entry only increases the risk of error for each new entry of information.

Administrative costs are a significant component of excess Washington state health spending. Administrative costs are the non-clinical costs of running a medical system. These costs can include billing and insurance-related expenditures, marketing and enrollment, credentialing, and quality measurement. This also creates an indirect equity cost when caring for an underserved population. Hospitals encounter increasing administrative costs due to practices like prior authorization and denials by commercial health insurers. Ongoing issues with workforce shortages and the high cost incurred from employee turnover further compound the administrative cost burden.

Reforming documentation systems is imperative to effective operations across our programs. Staff, as

well as clients, have an overarching burden with the overwhelming requirements in redundant paperwork. Data sharing systems would improve quality of care and efficient work practices. It would also bring forth a greater collaborative relationship across programs and health systems, both public and private. This would also ensure clients do not receive conflicting care and information. A data sharing system between state programs is key to creating standardized work processes, reducing costs, and boosting productivity. Eliminating redundancies is essential in modernization and enhancing equity within the community.

Supporting funding for improved technology can help reduce administrative burdens by connecting people to services and ensuring they can maintain access to them. For example, payment processing is now faster and cheaper than ever. Improved information technology capabilities could help lower administrative costs, such as by standardizing claims forms and improving the interoperability of medical records.

Policies to improve data sharing across Washington state departments and agencies would reduce the redundancy of data entry, improve communication, and would have a major positive impact on administrative responsibilities. This reduction in redundancies could free up staff for other critical purposes and provide a much-needed cost relief to the consumer.



Government Affairs

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