

Washington State Board of Health STATEMENT OF POLICY ON POSSIBLE 2013 LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

January 2013

It is the policy of the State Board of Health (Policy 01-001) to comment on legislative proposals that alter the Board's statutory authority, run counter to policy directions established in rule, or relate directly to activities in the Board's strategic plan. The Board also discusses major issues likely to appear on the Legislature's agenda and attempts to reach agreement on the sense of the Board on these issues prior to session. This statement represents the sense of the Board and will guide staff and members in their communications. It is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. Over the course of legislative session, staff will review a wide variety of bills.

The Board is deeply concerned about the cumulative effect of six years of budget reductions and the drastic cuts proposed to the state budget this biennium. The Board believes that additional cuts to education, mental health, health care, and prevention activities and services will lead to lost productivity, increased incarceration, more crisis care for people with chronic diseases, and greater overutilization of emergency rooms.

The Board does not have a counterproposal to the significant reductions that are necessary to achieve a balanced budget. For this reason, the Board will refrain from commenting on proposals for reducing the budget unless it can offer up an alternative or support another proposal already under consideration. It may, however, comment on policy proposals that are low-cost, no-cost, or cost-saving. It may also comment on proposals that would lay the foundation for future reforms and on proposals that would make government more effective, create partnerships to deliver critical services that government cannot provide on its own, and preserve critical capacity that might be needed in the future.

Strategic Goal 1: Strengthen the public health system

- The Board supports stable, secure public health funding that would enable state and local agencies to meet state and national standards. It believes this funding should be linked to inflation and population growth. It would support efforts to secure additional revenue dedicated to public health and to set the stage for a stable and **secure** funding mechanism in the future. It would support local health jurisdictions in examining the current public health funding, governance, service delivery, and funding options. The Board also supports the priorities in the *2012 Agenda for Change Action Plan for Washington's Public Health Network*.

Strategic Goal 2: Increase access to preventive services

- **Access to care:** The Board is concerned about access to preventive services, availability of care for children and the elderly, and addressing the ways in which inequities in care contribute to health disparities. It supports ongoing efforts to implement health reform in Washington, including those through the Health Benefits Exchange, Medicaid Expansion and efforts that promote prevention, advance health equity, and strengthen the public health system. It is supportive of efforts to control the costs of medical care as a way to preserve fiscal capacity that can be directed toward public health and other prevention-oriented

programs and services. The board supports insurance benefits that focus on evidence-based, promising practices, and cost-effective preventive care.

- **Immunizations:** The Board supports efforts to increase utilization of adult immunizations, particularly for those who work with vulnerable populations. It has criteria for adding diseases on the list of vaccine-preventable illnesses against which children entering school or child care must be immunized. Authority to mandate vaccines should continue to reside with the Board. It encourages policies that increase the capacity of schools, child care centers, and local health jurisdictions to pursue full immunization of all children. It supports efforts to educate the public about the immunizations and to correct misinformation about their safety. The board would support legislation that would decrease immunization exemption rates.
- **Health Home:** The Board supports ongoing efforts by the state, in partnership with the federal government, to encourage health homes, especially for children. The Board recognizes that people who have a health home:
 - Are more likely to receive preventive health care such as regular check-ups, immunizations, and health screening.
 - Have fewer emergency room visits and hospitalizations.
 - Miss fewer days of work or school.
 - Have fewer unmet health needs.
 - Receive better care regardless of race or income.
- **Behavioral Health:** The lack of adequate resources needed to address behavioral health issues and mental illness is a longstanding public health problem. The Board supports programs and policies that promote a preventive, population-based, and coordinated public health approach to mental health. It supports integration of behavioral health and primary care delivery. It would also support organizational reforms that would make more private and public funds available to help local communities reduce childhood trauma and address risk and protective factors affecting mental wellness. The Board supports improving mental health parity with other health care.
- **Oral Health:** The Board is concerned about poor access to oral health care for low income and underserved populations. It supports solutions that increase these populations' knowledge of the importance of oral health to overall health, and the ways to access care, and reduce coverage barriers. Given the limited access to children's dental care, it supports the ability of communities and water systems to use fluoridation as a population-based approach to preventing tooth decay in accordance with Board rules and the latest federal recommendations.
- **School Health:** The Board encourages implementation of school-based health centers and other school-associated programs that improve children's access to primary and preventive services through either direct care provision or referrals (including programs to address chronic diseases). The Board recognizes the importance of providing students adequate access to school nurses and mental health counselors.

Strategic Goal 3: Reduce health disparities

- **Governor's Council:** The Board staffs the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities, which is releasing its updated action plan for eliminating disparities by race/ethnicity and gender in December 2012. The Board supports efforts to address health disparities, including the Council's recommendations. The Board is particularly supportive of those recommendations that can be implemented with little or no additional state funds.
- **Academic Achievement:** The Board has done extensive work on the connection between academic achievement gaps and health disparities. Education is a major social determinant of health. The Board would support programs and policies such as those identified in *Research Review: School-based Health Interventions and Academic Achievement* (SBOH, OSPI, & DOH, 2009). It is particularly supportive of policies and programs that would simultaneously improve academic performance for students of color and increase health equity. The Board supports the Washington State Institute for Public Policy's findings, which examine the return on investment for evidence based options to improve outcomes in areas such as K-12 education, early childhood education programs, and to help guide policy decisions.

Strategic Goal 4: Encourage healthy behaviors

The Board believes policy should encourage physical activity, improve opportunities for healthy nutrition, and promote healthy behaviors, particularly in underserved communities.

- **Physical Activity and Nutrition:** The Board supports science-based policies and promising practices to improve physical activity and nutrition in school, workplace, and community settings. The Board strongly supports recess and physical education. It believes opportunities for exercise and movement during the school day result in better educational outcomes. The board supports evidence-based recommendations, policies and promising practices that are community-based and foster active, independent lives for people 65 years and older.
- **Tobacco:** The Board supports implementation of the Department of Health's *Tobacco Prevention and Control Plan*, including efforts aimed at minority communities with disproportionate tobacco use. The board also supports initiatives that take advantage of the 2009 Federal Family Smoking and Prevention Act, which grants states more authority to limit tobacco advertising and helps restrict point of sale to youth for tobacco products.
- **Substance Abuse:** The Board has long been concerned about the growing epidemic of alcohol and narcotic misuse and abuse. It would support initiatives to fund programs, such as prescription monitoring, that help reduce abuse and diversion.

Strategic Goal 5: Promote Healthy and Safe Environments

The Board develops and adopts rules on a wide variety of environmental health issues, and it supports environmental health initiatives by other agencies that have the potential to improve human health—for example, the Department of Ecology's and Department of Health's efforts to reduce human exposure to toxic chemicals.

- **Built Environments:** The Board supports integrating public health into land use, transportation, and community development planning so that social and physical environments promote healthy behavioral choices.
- **On-site Sewage:** The Board would support legislative initiatives that apply peer-reviewed science to on-site regulation and are consistent with Resolution 04-04 and existing Board rules. It would support legislation that would enhance wastewater management programs in a manner that emphasizes environmental public health protections.
- **Children's Environmental Health:** The Board is concerned about protecting children from exposure to environmental health hazards, especially those that could have long-lasting health impacts. It would support legislation and educational initiatives to address proven environmental health hazards that pose special risks to children.
- **Food Safety:** The Board adopts food service rules and food service worker rules to protect the health, safety, and well-being of the public and prevent the spread of disease through food. The Board supports continued food worker training by local health officers in multiple formats, including distance training. The Board supports consistent, statewide implementation of food safety rules, but also supports the authority of local boards of health to be stricter based on local public health needs. It would support legislation consistent with these principles.
- **School Environmental Health and Safety:** The Board has adopted but is not able to implement an updated rule for environmental health and safety in schools. It recognizes that the resources needed to effectively implement the rule are currently tied to the lack of adequate funding for public education. It would support efforts to provide full funding of school operations and maintenance as part of basic education reform.
- **Environmental Justice:** The Board adopted a policy report in 2001 to promote environmental justice. It would support measures that encourage state and local agencies to consider environmental justice concerns in health-related decisions.
- **Injury Prevention:** The Board supports injury prevention initiatives such as safe storage of fire arms, safe routes to school and senior falls prevention.