

Statement of the Board on Possible Legislative Issues

2025 Legislative Session

It is the policy (Policy 01-001) of the Washington State Board of Health (Board) to comment on legislative proposals that affect the Board's:

- [Statutory authority](#) and rules, and
- [2024 State Health Report](#) Recommendations, ~~and~~
- ~~[2017-2022 strategic plan](#) activities~~

This statement represents the Sense of the Board and is intended to guide staff and Board members in their communications on legislative and budget proposals. The statement is not an exhaustive list of anticipated legislative topics. It focuses on possible legislative issues that may impact the Board or the public health system.

Foundational Public Health Services

The Board believes that [Public Health is Essential](#) and supports the governmental public health system's efforts to fund the system for the delivery of Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) so these services are available in every community. The governmental public health system must be able to monitor health, focus on prevention, assure health for all, and be capable of an all-hazards response. It is critical for the State to provide adequate, dedicated, stable funding for full implementation of FPHS statewide that keeps pace with inflation and demand for services and that provides resources to address inequities and innovate and modernize the governmental public health system. This includes increasing the Board's capacity to meet its statutory obligations under Chapter 43.20 RCW and other state laws. The Board **opposes** reductions to funding for the governmental public health system.

Advancing Health Justice and Equity in State Government

The Board recognizes that racism is a public health crisis and is embedded within the health care delivery and public health systems. Racism and other forms of discrimination have been and continue to be institutionalized and perpetuated through policies and practices that prevent meaningful community engagement and limit opportunity and access to important public services. Health inequities cannot be eliminated without addressing structural and institutional racism in these systems. The Board supports legislation prioritizing and operationalizing health justice and equity across state government.

The Board supports the efforts of the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities (Council) to use a health justice framework to advance enduring health equity and social justice. Health justice centers the following principles: racial equity; collaboration across areas of study and work; upstream interventions that address root causes of inequities and injustice; adaptability; advocacy for systems change; and community-based strategies that uphold community power. The Board supports the Council's legislative proposal to update the Council's name, membership, duties, and authority in RCW 43.20 and related laws. The Board also supports ongoing funding for the Council in the state's operating budget to support the Council's operations; enhance community/partner engagement, communications, and collaboration; and provide language assistance services and community compensation.

Health Impact Reviews

Under RCW 43.20.285 the Board conducts [Health Impact Reviews](#) (HIRs) at the request of the Governor or a legislator. HIRs are objective, non-partisan, evidence-based analyses of proposed legislative or budgetary changes to determine the potential impacts on health and equity. The Board receives funding for 1.6 FTE through the FPHS budget, which contributes 2.6 FTE total to conduct HIRs. HIRs improve the state's ability to use evidence to inform policy and to promote health and equity. The Board supports additional state and legislative efforts to assess equity impacts of legislative proposals, and the Board recognizes the unique value that HIRs add to legislative decision-making. The rigorous HIR research approach, which uses both quantitative and qualitative research, as well as lived experience, provides legislators with a nuanced understanding of how proposed policy may impact health and equity in the state. The Board supports the retention of HIRs and will continue to offer assistance and support to ensure any newly proposed tools align with and do not duplicate the work of HIRs.

The Board supports legislative action to ensure long-term, sustainable solutions to obtain peer-reviewed literature access for HIR work. The Board believes there is also a need for all state entities (agencies, boards, commissions, councils, etc.) to have access to research and published literature to inform evidence-based policy and program development.

School Environmental Health and Safety

The Board is committed to carrying out the school rule project funded in the 2024 operating budget and looks forward to hearing and considering the technical advisory committee's recommendations. Local health jurisdictions must have sufficient resources and capacity to conduct school environmental health and safety inspections to assure minimum health and safety protections for all school children across the state. Schools must have adequate funding for school modernization, repair, and remediation to improve school environmental health and safety. The Board supports legislation and capital and operating budget proposals to increase funding for schools to improve environmental health and safety and align school environmental health and safety and building efficiency standards. The Board also supports the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's request for ongoing support for equitable access to clean air and improving classroom air quality capital decision package, as well as continued funding to the Department of Health's grant program for school districts using small district modernization grants to make updates to existing heating, venting and air conditioning systems.

Commercial Tobacco Products, with Special Attention to Flavors

The Board supports efforts to prevent the marketing, sale, and use of commercial tobacco products to youth, including restrictions on flavored vapor and tobacco products (also known as commercial tobacco). The Board recognizes that the widespread availability of flavored commercial tobacco products and targeted marketing practices, such as the advertising of menthol products to Black and LGBTQIA+ communities and flavored vapor products to youth, raise significant health equity concerns. The Board supports legislation that would strengthen regulation of Washington's commercial tobacco product industry, including requiring ingredient disclosure and routine lab testing for vapor products, requiring health risk signage for commercial tobacco products, removing the preemption of vapor product retail licensing, allowing flavored commercial tobacco product bans and recalls, and establishing nicotine limits for products sold in Washington.

Newborn Screening

The Board has the authority to define and adopt rules for newborn screening in Washington, which include the list of conditions for which the Department of Health's Newborn Screening program screens all newborns. When the Board adds a new condition, the Department must assess the programmatic and fiscal impacts to the current program. The Washington Health Care Authority's Medicaid Program covers about forty percent of births in Washington. The addition of new conditions may require the Department and Health Care Authority to request an increase in the newborn screening fee to cover the costs of new screening tests, staff time, and follow-up services for babies with positive screens, as well as other programmatic and administrative costs. The Board supports funding requests to increase the newborn screening fee to cover the costs associated with new conditions.

Aquatic and Water Recreation Facilities

The Board recognizes that drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages one through four years and is a significant source of morbidity in children under 19 years. State and local regulations on aquatic facilities, water recreation facilities, and designated swim areas are necessary and important to protect the health, safety, and welfare of those who use them. The Board supports proposals to prevent injury, illness, and death at facilities including but not limited to swimming pools, hot tubs, splash pads, water parks, natural designated swim areas.

Drinking Water

The Board recognizes that safe, reliable drinking water systems and drinking water supplies are essential for public health protection and community wellbeing. The Board's Group A rules cover the state's largest public water systems, and its Group B rules apply to public systems that generally serve fewer than fifteen connections. The Board supports budget and policy proposals that strengthen implementation of these rules, drinking water infrastructure, and source water protection. Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a family of more than 12,000 synthetic organic chemicals used in many products, including waterproof clothing, furniture, food packaging, and firefighting foam. Recent federal drinking water standards and proposed federal PFAS waste regulations will affect some Washington state cleanup sites. The Board supports the Department of Ecology's request for additional funding and staff resources to conduct sampling and identify contaminated sites, initiate clean up and provide safe drinking water as interim action during cleanups, and development of a strategy for reducing PFAS in the environment.

Immunizations

The Board recognizes the research and data that demonstrate that immunizations reduce the incidence of vaccine-preventable disease in our community and protect those who are immunocompromised and not vaccinated. The Board supports legislation that helps reduce the number of children out of compliance with state immunization documentation requirements, assists schools and childcares in monitoring the immunization status of children, and increases immunization rates across all age groups. The Board also supports additional funding to improve and maintain access to the Washington State Immunization System.