



**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Whatcom County Council / Board of Health

**From:** Satpal S. Sidhu, County Executive  
Aly Pennucci, Deputy Executive/Administrative Services Director  
Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive

**Re:** WCHCS Leadership Plan

**Date:** March 24, 2025

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On March 19, 2025 there became a vacancy in the position of Whatcom County Health and Community Services Director ("Administrative Director" under WCC 24.01.040). This memo provides clarity on both the immediate and longer-term steps for filling this vacancy. Please note that the steps for filling this vacancy with a regular director may be adjusted based on input from our professional recruiter, as well as stakeholders.

**Plan immediately upon separation (effective 3/19)**

*Dr. Amy Harley, WC Health Officer, assumes the powers and duties of the administrative director. Assistant Director Charlene Ramont provides administrative and operational support to Dr. Harley.*

Upon the separation of Erika Lautenbach from County employment (effective March 19, 2025), Dr. Harley, WC Health Officer, will assume the powers and duties of the Administrative Director. Assistant Director Charlene Ramont will provide operational and administrative support to Dr. Harley.

As outlined in WCC 24.01.040(B) and RCW 70.05.040, if no administrative director is appointed, the Health Officer, under the direction of the County Executive, assumes the responsibilities of the Administrative Director. This ensures continuity of operations for WCHCS. Dr. Harley has indicated that she is graciously willing to assume this role temporarily. The next step is to appoint an interim administrative director until a permanent appointment is confirmed by the County Council.

**Interim Plan until a regular administrative director is selected**

*Assistant Director Charlene Ramont is appointed as Interim Administrative Director until a regular appointment is confirmed by the County Council*

The Executive will appoint Assistant Director Charlene Ramont as the Interim Administrative Director until a regular appointment is confirmed by the County Council. Although WCC 24.01.030(A) provides the Executive with authority to appoint a regular administrative director, it is silent on the process for selecting an interim director. Following advice from our legal counsel, the Executive will present Charlene Ramont for interim appointment confirmation to the County Council on March 25, 2025. If confirmed, Charlene will serve as the Administrative Director until a regular appointment is made.

Charlene Ramont has extensive experience in public health leadership, operations, planning, and project management. Since September 3, 2024 she has served as Assistant Director of the Whatcom County Health & Community Services Department. Before joining Whatcom County, Ms. Ramont worked for the Public Health Department of Shasta County California for over 19 years. She held increasingly responsible roles there, culminating in four years as Deputy Director.

Ms. Ramont earned her Masters in Public Health from State University of New York in Albany; and Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

Additionally, to support the transition, the Executive's office is augmenting resources within WCHCS. Jill Boudreau, Senior Policy & Project Manager in the Executive's Office, will provide specialized assistance to WCHCS for the Healthy Children's Fund and other policy and management needs. Doug Merriman of Merriman Consulting, LLC, will support WCHCS with high-level budgeting functions.

#### **DRAFT PLAN: Appointment of Regular Administrative Director position**

*The County will initiate a comprehensive recruitment process for a new administrative director. The Executive's office will serve as the lead party in the recruitment process.*

Below is an outline of the key steps we will take to conduct a search and make a regular appointment for the vacant WCHCS Administrative Director position. We are collaborating with Whatcom County Human Resources to engage a recruitment consultant who will advise on the process and assist with the administrative aspects of recruiting for a director-level position.

This outline is informed by and incorporates the policy for filling a vacancy in the Health Officer distributed to Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) in October 2024 by the former Administrative Director and current Health Officer and to fulfill requirements outlined in WCC and applicable state law provisions<sup>1</sup>

This is just an initial draft and will be updated as we get input from stakeholders and engage a professional recruiter.

- 1. Review and Redraft Job Description:**

- Solicit feedback from the WCHCS Management Team, PHAB, BOH, WCHCS staff, and other stakeholders on the skills and experience desired in the new Administrative Director.

- 2. Solicit Feedback on the Recruitment Process:**

- Present the revised job description to the BOH, PHAB, and WCHCS staff, and solicit feedback on the recruitment process.

- 3. Request Appointment of PHAB and BOH Members for Review:**

- Request that PHAB and BOH appoint members to formally review the revised job description and ensure it aligns with the needs of the department.

- 4. Post the Job Widely:**

- Ensure broad visibility by posting on the county website and affiliated/industry sites.

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<sup>1</sup> Citations: RCW 70.05.040; RCW 70.46.140; WCC 24.01.030, 0140, 060

- Notify PHAB and other stakeholders that it is posted and encourage it is further disseminated to potentially interested parties.
- 5. **Screen Initial Candidates:**
  - Executive's Office/HR Consultant conducts phone/virtual screenings to assess candidates' understanding of the role and their qualifications. Create list of candidates to move on to next round of interview.
- 6. **Conduct Internal Interviews:**
  - The Executive's Office or HR consultant will coordinate internal interviews, which will include representation from Department staff.
  - The Executive's Office or HR consultant will create a list of candidates to be interviewed by a community panel, which will include County Council/BOH/PHAB designees, and other relevant stakeholders.
- 7. **Convene Community Panel:**
  - The Executive's Office, in coordination with the Chair of PHAB and BOH, will solicit nominations for members to serve on the community interview panel.
- 8. **Final Candidate Recommendations:**
  - After the interviews, PHAB members on the panel will provide recommendations for the top candidate(s) to the Executive's Office and BOH. The Executive's Office will also gather feedback from all participants on the various interview panels.
- 9. **Final Interview and Appointment:**
  - The Executive will conduct a final interview with the recommended candidates and forward the appointment for confirmation by the County Council.
- 10. **Council Confirmation**
  - Council will consider the Executive's appointment and ideally confirm.

Deputy Executive Schott-Bresler will be the main point of contact if there are questions regarding next steps.