



## Memo

**TO:** Councilmembers, Executive Sidhu  
**FROM:** Malora Christensen, Response Systems Manager, Health and Community Services  
**RE:** *didgʷálič* Wellness Center/Health and Community Services Partnership  
**DATE:** **NOVEMBER 25, 2024**

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One of the key priorities in the Fentanyl Operations Plan is to increase availability of treatment and stabilization services for people experiencing opioid use disorder. A signature initiative within the Plan is to increase availability of medication, treatment, clinical, and behavioral health services by partnering with the *didgʷálič* Wellness Center.

### Background

For the past two years, Health and Community Services staff have provided referrals and transportation of Whatcom County residents to receive treatment and supportive services at the *didgʷálič* Wellness Center in Anacortes, Washington.

In February of 2024, Swinomish Tribal Council leaders approached elected leaders in Whatcom County and offered to develop satellite treatment services, including two mobile medical units. Initial conversations with leaders from the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, and the Swinomish Tribe were very positive and staff were directed to identify a location and an operational model.

### Location

2028 Division Street, which is the unoccupied space formerly used as crisis stabilization facility, contains three clinical treatment rooms, four behavioral health counseling/office spaces, laundry and shower facilities, and an open space for patients to wait for services or attend group sessions. Outside, there is ample space to daily park two mobile medical units as well as parking for patients and staff. The Division Street campus is recognized as a site for a therapeutic milieu that includes the Anne Deacon Center for Hope, the future 23-Hour Crisis Facility, Response System staff including ART, Overdose Prevention, Transportation and Co-Responders, and additional therapeutic offerings once the Work Release facility is relocated to the new jail. The lease agreement, which will be in front of council on January 14, enables the site to be operated by *didgʷálič* Wellness Center for a period of three years.



## **Operational Model**

didgʷálič Wellness Center was founded by the Swinomish Tribe with the vision that a compassionate and effective response to the opioid crisis requires working together to serve everyone in our region. didgʷálič Wellness Center is the first clinic in the country to offer integrated whole person care under one roof for people experiencing opioid use disorder. The Bellingham didgʷálič Wellness Center (located at the Division Behavioral Health Campus), will pair life-saving medication with addiction counseling. didgʷálič will also offer free transportation to their services in Anacortes, where there is enough space to offer mental health care, primary care, cultural activities, dental care, and social service case management in addition to addiction treatment.

The Bellingham didgʷálič Wellness Center is anticipated to open in the first few months of 2025, operating six days a week to dispense medical for people with opioid use disorder. In addition to the mobile medical units, didgʷálič will also employ doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants who will evaluate patients and nurses will administer medications. Client navigators, SUD counselors, peer counselors, and security will also be on site to assist clients.

The didgʷálič Wellness Center will accept walk-in and scheduled appointments. Hours of operation are from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM, (tentative) with dosing hours available from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM (tentative).

Whatcom County Health and Community Services will work closely with the Bellingham didgʷálič team to support and coordinate services with Whatcom County providers. This information will be shared in community-based information: Behavioral Health & Crisis System meeting, Crisis System Oversight Committee, GRACE care coordination meeting, LEAD operational work group, Whatcom County Outreach Teams and other community events.

In addition, the Response Systems division teams (ART, Co-Responder, GRACE, LEAD, Mental Health Court, Street Medicine) will work closely with the Bellingham didgʷálič team to coordinate referrals and prioritize access to care.

Please contact Malora Christensen with questions prior to or following the briefing.