



Memorandum

TO: Local Board of Health/Whatcom County Council

FROM: Public Health Advisory Board

DATE: January 8, 2026

RE: Public Health Advisory Board Structure and Recruitment

This memo transmits to the Whatcom County Council, acting as the local board of health, the results of a vote held by the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) on December 11, 2025, including findings and a recommendation regarding the internal structure of the PHAB and a request for consideration of potential recruitment processes to fill current vacancies with a supplemental table to assist your consideration of applicants for the 2026 Board (Attachment A). It details the participants, inputs, and processes that led to the recommendation below.

Although PHAB has operated under the “Hub & Spoke” model for the past few years, this structure was never officially formalized. It may be restricting the representation of the broader community, especially our more rural residents. While PHAB members who serve on PHAB to represent other advisory boards may provide updates from those advisory boards, we observed that members designated as “at large” represent key groups not formally listed as a “spoke” in the current Hub & Spoke model. Although well-intentioned, the current design of the Hub & Spoke model limits broader representation, and may result in prioritizing discussion of advisory updates over actual action. Three models of PHAB composition were compared at the December 11th meeting, and the board decided to adopt the Vital Conditions Model to advance its work. (See attached).

This comparison allowed PHAB to identify a need for specific expertise and lived experience in the following categories:

1. Basic Needs for Health & Safety, including chronic disease prevention, food security, trauma prevention, maternal and infant health & childcare, and healthy aging.
2. Lifelong Learning, such as youth mental health, early childhood education, and school attendance.
3. Meaningful Work & Wealth, such as economic stability, wealth-building opportunities, and participation by non-profits and the regulated business community.
4. Humane Housing with a focus on affordability and stability.
5. Reliable Transportation, including representation from our rural neighborhoods, alternatives to vehicles, and public transit.



6. Thriving Natural world that may include individuals who have ecology expertise and promote access to nature or air quality experts.

Current PHAB members represent some of the categories listed above, but membership is limited due to numerous vacancies at this time; both partial and full terms are available. Expanding the board composition to align with [the Vital Conditions for Health Framework](#) could improve PHAB's ability to engage community members who aren't typically considered "experts" or already involved in county-convened boards and committees.

Our goal is to increase communal connections and ensure all residents feel they can actively participate in creating a healthier Whatcom County. We want everyone to know their opinions are valued and to foster a sense of belonging. We aim to build a diverse group that provides opportunities for individuals to learn about civic engagement and feel empowered to drive positive change in their communities.

Whatcom County Code 24.01 and RCW 70.46.140 assign the responsibility to the Local Board of Health to recruit and appoint members to PHAB. We hope you will consider our requests regarding these processes. Members are available to assist with recruitment efforts upon request from the LBOH.

Thank you for all the support you have provided to PHAB in the past. We look forward to becoming a more effective capacity-building resource as we strive to adopt a more representative community engagement model.

Please call Nicole Ervin at 360-778-6006 if there are any questions. Thank you.

Attachment A: Supplemental PHAB Recommendations Pertaining to Potential 2026 PHAB Board Composition

Name	District	Occupation	Vital Conditions						Urgent Services	Tribal/Other minority	Pop at risk	Other Notes
			Basic needs	Learning	Work/Wealth	Housing	Natural World	Transportation				
Mike Cohen	2	Dir Bham Food Bank	X						Food bank			WC \$
Christine Espina	1	WWU Nursing		X						X		CHA/CHIP MPH/MSN
Alison Fontaine	2	Peace Health	X						Acute Care			QA specialist
Carl Isom-McDaniel	3	Water/Park districts			X		X				X	Environ clean-up
Rachel McGarrity	2	Peace Health RN	X	X					Acute Care			MSN PHAB chair
Nathaline Nivens	5	Oregon State	X						Crime Response	X		Program analyst
Robyn Phillips-Madson	5	Physician	X						Acute Care			MPH
Deb Shawver	3	Social Worker		X								Mental health
Markis Dee Stidham	1	Homeless advocate	X			X	X		Homeless Services		X	
Ashley Thomasson	2	Dir Lydia Place	X		X	X			Homeless Services			Non-profit
Ben Twigg	5	Finance-Foodbank	X						Food Assistance			WC \$
Ameila Vader	3	Bham School Dis	X	X								Non-profit experience
Shu-Ling Zhao	2	Chuckanut HF	X	X	X					X		Non-profit CHA/CHIP

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Name	District	Occupation	Vital Conditions						Urgent Services	Tribal/Other minority	Pop. at risk	Other
			Basic needs	Learning	Work/Wealth	Housing	Natural World	Transportation				
Sterling Chick		Retired	X			X						Children & Families
Kendra Cristelli		Dir of Support Officers	X		X				Crime Response			
Joni Hensley	4	Retired	X				X					PHN/EHS
Chris Kobdish		DV Services	X						Crime Response			Opioid Taskforce
Alan Lifson		Retired	X	X								MPH/PHD
Guy Occhiogrosso		Business			X							COVID response

Key: Shading designates current board members (current list includes update based on Dr Shannon Boustead's resignation as of Jan 8, 2026)

Notes:

- Vital Conditions definitions are listed below (reference [Loma Linda Community Health Needs Assessment-2025](#), page 2 Table of Contents)
- 2026 PHAB application materials were used to generate this table and may not be comprehensive of each applicant.
- District of residence for existing board members was not available for everyone

Vital Conditions: 1. **Basic Needs for Health & Safety**, including chronic disease prevention, food security, trauma prevention, maternal and infant health & childcare, and healthy aging. 2. **Lifelong Learning**, such as youth mental health, early childhood education, and school attendance. 3. **Meaningful Work & Wealth**, such as economic stability, wealth-building opportunities, and participation by non-profits and the regulated business community. 4. **Humane Housing** with a focus on affordability and stability. 5. **Reliable Transportation**, including representation from our rural neighborhoods, alternatives to vehicles, and public transit. 6. **Thriving Natural world** that may include individuals who have ecology expertise and promote access to nature or air quality experts.

RCW 70.46.140 and Whatcom County Code 24.01.051 give preference to tribal, racial, ethnic and other minorities and members of communities that experience health inequities (vulnerable populations). For complete code language and other inclusions see references.