

Whatcom County  
Board of  
Health/Public Health  
Advisory Board  
Working  
Group Structure  
Recommendation

Joint Meeting of Whatcom  
County Board of Health and  
the Public Health Advisory  
Board

April 1, 2025

# Presenters

- ▶ Councilmember Jon Scanlon
- ▶ Dr. Christine Espina, Vice Chair, Public Health Advisory Board
- ▶ Joni Hensley, BSN, RN Member Public Health Advisory Board
- ▶ Kelli Carroll, Chair, Public Health Advisory Board

# Today's Discussion Topics

- ▶ Grounding in Working Group charge
  - Review changes to RCW for local boards of health
- ▶ Overview of Working Group process
  - Learnings from other counties
  - Sources informing recommendation development
- ▶ Rationale & pros/cons
- ▶ Implications & next steps

# Working Group Charge

- ▶ Analyze and recommend structure of the Health Board to the Health Board and County Council (October 29, 2024)
- ▶ Present recommendation to Health Board and the Council by the end of Q1 2025 (March)

# Recommendation on Structure of the Board of Health

Pursuant to [RCW 70.05.035](#), expand the Whatcom County Board of health to include:

- Other elected officials from jurisdictions within Whatcom County
- Public health experts - professionals with specific training in promoting and improving the health of populations
- Follow the requirements of [RCW 70.05.035](#) which specifies membership requirements

Expansion should follow the provisions of RCW 70.05.035 which specifies membership requirements.

The Whatcom County Board of Health and County Council should establish a joint workgroup with the Board of Health and Public Health Advisory Board members to ensure the Public Health Advisory Board's duties under Whatcom County Code 24.01.051 continue.

# Recent LBOH changes

Pre-2021; County Legislative Authority served as default LBOH, could pass ordinance to expand membership

2021; HB 1152 Passed, requiring local health jurisdictions to expand their local boards of health unless certain criteria met

Added categories of membership including:

- Public health/medical expertise
- Community member/partner
- Lived experience
- Tribal government



# Implementing 1152...

- 11 LBOHs met the criteria or were explicitly exempted from 1152 implementation
  - 1 Elected to move forward with expansion in 2021 (PHSKC)
  - 1 Required to expand after moving from district to county dept. (Snohomish)
- 24 LBOHs required to expand by 2022
  - 14 already had some form of expanded LBOH beyond BoCC
    - 10 had community members
    - 4 had city officials only

**As of 2024; all LBOH “compliant” with 6 LBOHs with BoCC only**

# WA was the exception, now closer to norm

Most local boards of health have at least one member who is a **healthcare professional**

Percent of local boards of health with at least one member with the following professional backgrounds



\*Prior to serving on the local board of health

n=337-372

NACCHO, 2015 Local Board of Health National Profile 10 (June 2016), [8](https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Local-Board-of-Health-Profile.pdf)  
<https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/Local-Board-of-Health-Profile.pdf>.



# Workgroup Process

- ▶ Workgroup members representing Board of Health and PHAB met eight times between November 2024 and February 2025.
- ▶ Gathered and synthesized data including previous reports and statutes
- ▶ Conducted interviews with six county Boards of Health.
- ▶ Collected and reviewed high level input from digital community survey.
- ▶ Generated key observations.
- ▶ Shared and discussed initial draft recommendation with PHAB at 2.13 meeting along with individual discussions with some PHAB members.
- ▶ Determined draft final recommendation its 2.14 Working Group meeting informed by PHAB feedback.
- ▶ On 3.6, PHAB updated the language of the final recommendation and unanimously approved it as provided to the Council/BoH.

# Counties that Expanded their Boards of Health

## ▶ Quicker information access from subject matter experts

"when it was only elected officials, we were missing people in the field of public health, people with knowledge of health systems. Now there's no delay in finding expertise - we get it in real time. Board member background is more diverse than previous model. We could benefit from a public health advisory board; we would benefit from having more health experts at the table."

## ▶ Diversity of board composition provides a broader perspective

"Electeds hear a lot of things, and people in community hear different things. Ex. one [board] member has experience with homelessness and is Black; previously it was all white. Live [experience] is helpful. Tribes experience is helpful. Broader perspective than before."

# Interview Summaries: Counties with Expanded BoH

- Combining elected and non-elected officials on health boards helps reduce political pressure in decision-making.
- The blended structure brings more public health expertise to the board through both practitioners and consumers.
- It enables greater tribal representation in health department operations.
- An expanded board appears successful based on feedback from Local Health Jurisdiction interviewees.

# Whatcom County Context -Sources Informing Recommendation Development

- ▶ WSALPHO Presentation to Whatcom County Council on BoH structure - Nov 6, 2024
- ▶ Committees and Commissions Survey & Report
- ▶ National Academy Medicine Report
- ▶ WA State After Action Report - SBOH, 2023
- ▶ BERK Consulting Report (After Action report for WC Pandemic Response, 2022)

# Recommendation on Structure of the Board of Health

Pursuant to [RCW 70.05.035](#), expand the Whatcom County Board of health to include:

- Other elected officials from jurisdictions within Whatcom County
- Public health experts - professionals with specific training in promoting and improving the health of populations
- Follow the requirements of [RCW 70.05.035](#) which specifies membership requirements

Expansion should follow the provisions of RCW 70.05.035 which specifies membership requirements.

The Whatcom County Board of Health and County Council should establish a joint workgroup with the Board of Health and Public Health Advisory Board members to ensure the Public Health Advisory Board's duties under Whatcom County Code 24.01.051 continue.

Local Board of Health

Elected Officials  
City & County  
N members

Non-Elected Members  
Must equal N members  
Including Tribal Representatives

Required:  
Two Tribal Representatives  
Selected by American Indian  
Health Commission

Category 1:  
Health Professionals  
Equal distribution if divisible by 3

Category 2:  
Public Health Consumers  
Equal distribution if divisible by 3

Category 3:  
Community Stakeholders  
Equal distribution if divisible by 3

Lummi Nation  
Representative

Nooksack Tribe  
Representative

- Choose max 1 from:
- Medical ethicist
  - Epidemiologist
  - Environmental health expert
  - Community health worker
  - Masters in public health
    - Hospital employee
    - Physician/Osteopath
    - Nurse practitioner
    - Physician assistant
    - Registered nurse
      - Dentist
      - Naturopath
      - Pharmacist

- Choose max 1 from:
- County resident
  - Faced health inequities
  - Experience with health programs
  - No health industry ties
  - Not an elected official

- Choose max 1 from:
- Community organizations
  - Armed services members
  - Business community
  - Environmental health regulated community



# Rationale for Recommendation

- ▶ Reflective of the majority of the online community survey respondents' feedback (76.3% supporting expansion).
- ▶ Provides for a broader array of knowledge and expertise to directly inform decision making by including
  - Healthcare and public health professionals; and
  - Community perspective and lived experience, tribes, and cities.
- ▶ Enables more direct communication with the community.
- ▶ Expands the Board's capacity to implement decisions.
- ▶ Ensures the duties of PHAB continue.

# Pros and Cons of Maintaining Existing Structure (The BoH is the County Council)

| Pros   | Cons  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Electoral accountability</li><li>➤ A body that advises the Council on matters of health and public health (PHAB)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Lack of health subject matter experts involved in decision-making</li><li>➤ Single legislative body holds decision-making power</li><li>➤ No representation of tribes or cities</li><li>➤ Role confusion: BoH member vs. County Councilmember</li></ul> |

# Implications of a Changed Structure

- ▶ Pending legal review, it appears PHAB may no longer be required in its current form should the structure of the current board change to include non-electeds.
- ▶ Legal and policy review of the statute is necessary to determine how the duties of the advisory board specified in [RCW 70.46.140](#) could continue.
- ▶ The County Council and Board of Health will need to determine timeline and process to implement recommendations.
- ▶ Whatcom County Code changes will be necessary to implement recommendations and revisions to the Health Board.

# Potential Next Steps

1. The Council/BoH to determine whether and when it will take up the recommendation.
2. Conducting the legal and policy review of the statute is necessary to determine how the duties of the advisory board specified in [RCW 70.46.140](#) could continue.
3. Creation of a joint workgroup to explore and inform the continuation of PHAB's duties under expanded structure.
4. In the meantime, PHAB will continue to meet and focus on its statutory obligations until formal changes are made by the County.