



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Discussion Form

July 10, 2023

AGENDA ITEM: Behavioral Health Fund reserve spend down

PRESENTER: Erika Lautenbach

BOARD ACTION: Action Item Discussion FYI - Only

Background:

The Behavioral Health sales tax supports a range of services throughout Whatcom County, including prevention activities, jail and community-based intervention and treatment services, and housing/aftercare supports for individuals with continued behavioral health needs.

The sales tax reserves are expected to reach nearly \$8M by the end of 2023, in part due to higher than expected overall sales tax revenues and in part because of COVID restrictions and staffing shortages among behavioral health providers. In addition, funds were held in reserves for a to-be-determined capital project and for general operating reserves.

Data from surveys and other collection tools show that youth and adults suffer from a variety of behavioral health concerns including depression, anxiety, and substance use. Youth mental health is a priority from a public health perspective in order to avoid or mitigate continued suffering and poor health over the lifecycle. The magnitude of challenges associated with youth mental health in Whatcom County is supported in recent years by data from the Healthy Youth Survey, Community Health Assessment, and COVID Health Impact Assessment. As a result, Whatcom County Health and Community Services recommends a portion of the reserves fund services supporting children and youth.

The matrix attached includes options for consideration, which include the following:

- Group A (blue) Systemwide/countywide assessments and supports – identified by all or most school district leadership when consulted
- Group B (green) School district-specific staffing and supports – requests directly from each school district based on need
- Group C (red) School district capital – requested by two school districts; more follow up is needed to determine funding level and appropriate additional funding sources

Staff will go over options and recommendations at the meeting and request direction via consensus on PHAB/BHAC recommendations to the Health Board at their August 1 meeting.

The preliminary options for PHAB/BHAC consideration are:

1. Fund Group A, fund Group B for three years, follow up on capital projects and consult PHAB/BHAC with findings
2. Fund Group A, fund Group B for two years, follow up on capital projects and consult PHAB/BHAC with findings
3. Fund Group A, fund Group B for two years, follow up in one year following more information about Group A findings and future funding needs as well as PHAB/BHAC interest in funding year three of Group B requests, follow up on capital projects and consult PHAB/BHAC with findings

Board role / action requested:

1. Reach consensus on a recommendation to the Health Board for a portion of expenditures of the Behavioral Health Fund sales tax reserves.

2. Attachment(s):