



Department Report

February, 2026

Equity – Collaboration – Compassion – Transparency – Innovation - Service

Leadership:

Health Director

- Department updates will be shared at the 2/3 joint meeting.

Health Officers

- Facilitating transition of MRC to WCHCS
- Measles preparedness and Respiratory Illness surveillance
- Immunizations messaging
- Strategic planning on opioid response

Financial Services:

- The accounting staff is piloting a new process to improve the efficiency of departmental payroll administration and to transition from paper-based employee timecards to fully electronic employee timecard processing. Once tested, the new process may be helpful to other departments who want to transition away from paper-based timecards.

Communicable Disease and Epidemiology (CD&E):

- **Immunization Program:** We are beginning the transition of vaccine services back to the Girard location from Chestnut. While we anticipate a full return by April, we will continue to plan on a quarterly basis to remain flexible in response to any changes. For Q1, monthly vaccine clinics for children under the age of 19 will continue to be offered at the Chestnut location. Clinic availability at Girard has already expanded to include both Wednesdays and Fridays.
- **Refugee Health Program:** We continue to serve several families each month. In 2025, this program served 372 clients, and referrals for services remain steady. To ensure client goals are met prior to the end of the grant period, we will stop accepting new referrals in August. Program funding and services are planned to end September 2026.
- **Sexual Health Program:** Services transitioned from Chestnut Professional Building to Girard. STI testing now offered Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9a-4p. Transition allows more coverage with less resources needed.

- **Infection Prevention Program:** Outbreak activity increased in health congregate settings with influenza, Covid-19, and norovirus. The IP team is also active assisting DOH with MDRO investigations.
- **Communicable Disease General:** Working towards established performance measures newly established. Proactively training and planning around measles and avian flu response. Working on a communication hub for disease response.

Community and Organizational Development (COD):

- Program Specialist, Danielle Humphreys, was highlighted in The Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE) in the *Racial Equity Insight: The Public Health Issue* discussing how Whatcom County HCS sustains equity work in today's climate.
- Flood Response:
 - Joyous VanMeter, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Specialist, and Amy Rydel, Health Planning Specialist, have been co-leading the Human Services branch- connecting flood-impacted community members with immediate basic-needs support, such as shelter and food as well as partner coordination, contract administration and oversight, funding alignment, guidance development, and recovery planning.
 - Communications Specialist, Marie Juneck, served as essential staff on the EOC public information team.
 - Heather McGuinness, Partnerships & Strategy Supervisor, served as Liaison to coordinate elected official visits, including Governor Ferguson.
 - Chelsea McGlothan and Danielle Humphreys also reported to EOC to support the response effort.
- Bethany Roulston, Communications Coordinator, has been working over the last year to ensure departmental compliance with online Accessibility regulations systematically updating every webpage, link, and attachment- deadline is April 2026.
- Heather McGuinness, Partnerships & Strategy Supervisor, is working with WSALPHO, Executives Office, and local legislators to track and disseminate information for public health and human service areas of interest in the Washington State Legislative session.
- Hunter Pluckebaum, Evaluator, and an intern from UW MPH are working with Kari Holley on the evaluation of the 2024 Fentanyl Operations Plan.

Community Health and Human Services (CH&HS):

- The **Nurse Family Partnership Program** is developing a new system to organize our health and parenting topics. This system helps ensure important topics are covered with each individual family. It will also increase continuity of care in the event that a client receives services from a new nurse.

- One of our nurses is out on family leave after welcoming a new baby into their home. We were fortunate to hire a former **NFP** Whatcom Nurse to serve her families while she is out so there is no lapse in service to these families during these crucial times.
- The **Homeless Housing Program's** Severe Weather Shelter has successfully activated twice for a total of 6 nights of operations. The activations went smoothly and staff were mobilized despite the co-occurring holidays.
- Housing staff have begun working on a project with the Department of Health to better coordinate housing services with enrollment in healthcare coverage through the five major managed care organizations in Washington State.
- New 5-year strategic plan was passed unanimously through county council in Q4 and housing team has pivoted to begin implementation.
- The **Developmental Disabilities** team had a successful RFP, open and close with some exciting opportunities coming from it. This RFP is resulting in a new Supported Employment Coalition that will be collaborating to increase opportunities for local students and job seekers, with developmental disabilities, to connect with internships and work experiences with some of Whatcom County's largest employers!
- There are some great videos highlighting the great programs our DD team supports in their work, check them out at the links below. Community Transitions that we made last year: [Community Transitions Program Success!](#)
- [Success Stories and Testimonials on the HireAbility website](#)
- One of the early **HCF programs** to get started was the doula program, where Medicaid eligible families were able to be referred to doulas that would provide services to those families during their pregnancy, delivery and even after. This is such a crucial developmental time for those babies and having this extra support for the family improves outcomes for these children. ***In 2025 there were over 250 referrals to the program and just over 80 new babies were born with this team of doulas*** helping to make their transition into the world a bit smoother for the families.
- The **Healthy Children's Fund** programs also support an internship program through Mobile Mama, which pairs interns pursuing a career in mental health, with a focus on support for new moms, with those moms who are eligible. They travel to those moms making it that much easier to access. ***In 2025 there were 185 intakes and 49 new clients seen in the program.*** This meant **959 sessions** between mental health worker and mamas took place, and these families got more support during this big time in their lives.
- The **Healthy Children's Fund** team has also been working to develop and draft guidance and process for utilizing the \$750,000 in healthy children's funding that Council prioritized for vulnerable children impacted by the floods. The opportunities for agencies

in the community to apply for this funding is available 1/22. More can be learned at the Healthy Children's website.

- Staff from across the CH&HS division also stepped up to support flood response by supporting work in the Human Services branch in December and January. While continuing to do work in their programs, they stepped away when they could to answer calls and triage issues at the EOC when needed.
- November, December and January also saw the birth of 3 new babies within the division, and are excited to have this powerhouse trio of babies join the Community Health and Human Services team!

Environmental Health (EH):

- The Food Safety Program met with mentors from Washoe County, Nevada, as part of an FDA program that pairs larger jurisdictions with smaller ones. We are working with Washoe County to improve our local program based on the FDA Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Standards. The team has reviewed and audited our compliance with FDA standards, from inspections to education and outreach. We've learned much from Washoe County; they have also benefited from our Food Team's expertise.
- Approximately 50% of the Environmental Health staff contributed to the 2025 Winter Weather Flood Response, both in debris management and human services.
- The implementation for the system for permitting, complaints and other business function is in full swing with user acceptance testing being conducted the weeks of January 12 and 20. The system is expected to Go Live in May 2026.

Response Systems (RS):

- Response Systems staff have been actively supporting transportation needs at the Severe Weather shelter. This type of activity improves connection to clients and has been very beneficial for outreach and case management staff.
- RSD is currently hosting 6 interns (undergrad and graduate level) in ART, GRACE and MH Court programs.
- The RSD team continues to work closely, in partnership with key stakeholders, on the development of the Behavioral Care Center (BCC), 23 Hour Crisis Center and Prosecutorial Diversion programs (PDP).
- A critical decision point has been made in the work towards a BCC and new Crisis Center. County Council approved the Division/BH Campus location as the site for the new BH facility. RSD staff will continue working with the Executive's Office for legislative support of both the capital and operational funding required.
- RSD leadership is actively monitoring the legislative session with some key bills that could impact Co-Response, Crisis Services and Involuntary Treatment Act.

- The Overdose Prevention and Response pilot continues to move forward, supporting individuals in our community who are at high risk of overdose. The pilot program was awarded additional funding in 2026 to implement an incentive program for individuals struggling with Substance Use Disorder.