



Department Report

December, 2025

Equity – Collaboration – Compassion – Transparency – Innovation - Service

Leadership:

Health Director

- Department updates will be shared at the 12/2 joint meeting.

Health Officers

- A tuberculosis presentation and some additional updates will be shared at the 12/2 joint meeting.

Financial Services:

- Welcomed the new Accounting Supervisor, Amy Byykkonen in November.

Communicable Disease and Epidemiology (CD&E):

- **Tuberculosis (TB) Program:** The TB team is actively addressing barriers to care for a diverse client population, including transportation, language, health literacy, and social challenges. Their efforts are crucial in ensuring timely treatment, preventing transmission, and supporting public health protections.
- **Immunization Program:** In collaboration with the Bellingham School District, staff have cleared the path for translating immunization records into WAIS. Efforts continue to identify a school partner for a potential on-site vaccination program.
- **Infection Prevention:** The team is providing ongoing infection control support to congregate settings, including managing an influenza outbreak and monitoring small COVID-19 clusters.
- **Communicable Disease:** Investigations remain steady, with a focus on potential increases in respiratory illnesses. Preparations are underway for possible measles and HPAI responses, and lessons learned from a recent E. coli outbreak are informing future response strategies.
- **Sexual Health:** The Chestnut Walk-in Clinic is serving 2–8 clients per session, with plans to transition services to Girard in January. Point-of-care pregnancy testing will be



offered at the clinic in the new year. Year-to-date STI case counts show a decrease compared to last year.

- **Refugee Health Program:** The program is expanding, with increased self-referrals for vaccine assessments and healthcare navigation, becoming a critical resource for refugees needing affordable services for green card applications.
- **Safety and Support Program (SSP):** SSP has strengthened partnerships with local housing providers, ensuring access to overdose-prevention resources like naloxone for both residents and visitors, contributing to the county's efforts to reduce fatal overdoses.
- **Community Health Program Specialist:** Ongoing support includes technical assistance for Mount Baker's school based health center permanent site development and contributions to the Whatcom Oral Health Coalition's mobile dental clinics. Exploring opportunities to establish a Fall Prevention Coalition and advancing healthy aging initiatives in collaboration with WCHCS

Community and Organizational Development (COD):

- Welcomed new Public Health Emergency Preparedness & Resiliency Specialist- Joyous VanMeter. She brings extensive preparedness and epidemiology experience at both the state and local level.
- The Communications Team developed an [informational video](#) to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of Mental Health Court.
- The HEAL Team developed an Equity and training, based on the findings of the Culture and Care Assessment that will be implemented with all staff as well as part of new staff orientation. Additionally, they have developed a Weekly TIP (Trauma Informed Practice) that goes out to staff in our weekly "News to Know".
- Epidemiology staff participated in the North Sound Regional Epidemiology and Assessment Meeting hosted by Snohomish County to share resources, discuss common issues, and identify opportunities for collaboration.

Community Health and Human Services (CH&HS):

- The Whatcom County **5-Year Homeless Housing Plan** was approved by the County Council on November 18th. It will now be sent to the Department of Commerce and will be the guiding document over the 2026-2030 years. It will have a yearly update as part of the cycle.
- The **severe weather shelter** is fully staffed and weather is being monitored daily. Thirty additional staff have been hired for the season, which includes a SWS Supervisor, 5 shift leads and 24 on-call attendants. The shelter opened for the first time this season on the nights of Saturday, 11/29 and Sunday, 11/30.
- The **Nurse Family Partnership** program will be hiring a temporary nurse to help with the currently enrolled caseload of 42 families while one of the nurses heads out on leave for several months. The NFP is also celebrating the conclusion of a very successful 8 week music class for their families. Many families that attended returned every week for

this fun and free opportunity to connect with other mothers while enjoying music and playing with their baby!

- The **Children and Families** team has been working hard and recently saw the **2025-2026 HCF implementation plan** approved by Council on 11/18/25. They have also begun sending intent to award letters out for capital childcare projects and hope to send more in the near future. The team is also reviewing the RFP's submitted to implement the childcare subsidies across Whatcom County. They are working to enter into a contract with a provider in early 2026 to help implement this large lift.
- The **Veterans Program** has submitted nearly 1200 VA claims in 2025 and continues to build connections with veterans and their family members to make sure they are getting the support, services and financial resources they need.
- The **Developmental Disabilities Program** had an open RFP to continue to build out supported employment and inclusion programs in Whatcom County. The first round of funding is being awarded for "Large Employer and Public Sector Supported Employment." Large employers are those with 400+ employees. The goal is to educate these employers on the benefits of hiring folks with DD and provide them with the tools and resources to do so successfully, thus building capacity across the community!
- The Department of Health has added \$40,000 to the OD2A grant which helps with **opioid education and marketing**. This helps to further leverage the opioid settlement dollars to make an even larger impact.
- The **Youth Cannabis and Commercial Tobacco Program** is happy to report that our contractors at United General trained over 100 youth from 16 schools across the region to be peer educators in October. These youth will deliver substance use prevention education to their younger peers throughout the year!

Environmental Health (EH):

- EH continues work on implementation of a new enterprise system that will modernize permitting, complaint management and reporting. The anticipated Go-Live date for Phase 1 is in May 2026.
- The Food Program is wrapping a project related to a Food and Drug Administration grant. We have partnered with Washoe County, Nevada to complete a self assessment and create procedures and tasks for the program. Eleven drafts of procedures and tasks have been completed thus far and Washoe County will be on-site for a two day event the week of December 1, to audit our Communications standard, review our draft procedures and tasks and provide training.
- The Food Program has been busy with two separate incidents involving a cheese recall from a local creamery affecting several state residents and an infant formula recall linked to a nationwide outbreak of infant botulism. Work includes contacting retailers, coordinating with internal programs and external agencies, responding to media requests and case investigation.
- Living Environment is building on foundations to create more robust programs, including improving procedures for School Environmental Health and Safety Assessments; working with owners of pools and spas that were previously unpermitted, to come into

compliance with regulatory codes and create more alignment between HCS and DOH code interpretation; and developing internal processes to improve coordination and communication with Solid Waste, On Site Sewage, and Planning and Development Services on RV Park review, permitting, and response to complex site complaints. BEACH Program annual report has been submitted to Ecology. Lake monitoring continues for HABs at Silver Lake and Lake Padden due to winter algae blooms.

- The On-Site Septic team held a free all day training event for industry members. Among the topics discussed included the current challenges following the major code change and updating the Local Management Plan in the next two years. Members who completed the training were given the required annual continuing education credits.
- The Solid Waste Program presented at the Solid Waste Executive Committee (SWEC) in late October. Subjects discussed included annual updates on the program and , with the assistance of our new Finance Manager, the 2026 budget. We are pleased to report that SWEC approved the 2026 budget.

Response Systems (RS):

- Welcomed new Alternative Response Team (ART) Behavioral Health Specialist expanding the team to 6 staff.
- RSD is currently hosting 6 interns (undergrad and graduate level) in ART, GRACE and MH Court programs.
- RSD Special Projects Manager Hannah Fisk presented as part of the Justice Project Town Hall on Thursday, November 20th. Hannah's work focuses on enhancing Behavioral Health services throughout the continuum of care.
- 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).
- RSD staff are in the process of completing their annual required trainings, per our Dept. of Health Behavioral Health Agency (BHA) certification.
 - Violence Prevention and De-Escalation
 - Suicide Prevention
 - Motivational Interviewing (advanced skills)
 - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
- RSD continues to build-out our data platform, Julota, to measure the impact of RSD programs on emergency services and healthcare services. In 2026, we will be soliciting an evaluator to complete a multi-year, multi-program evaluation of RSD programs. The final eval report would be completed in summer of 2027.
- RSD leadership is ramping up for the legislative session. Our legislative priorities include maintaining state funding, maintaining Medicaid insurance access, sustainable funding for 23 Hour Crisis operations, 988 enhanced operations.