



WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
Boards and Commission Vacancies

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

AB2026-034

13 Vacancies, ten 3-year full terms, **2 partial terms ending 1/31/2028 and 1 partial term ending 1/31/2027**. Nine applicants are eligible to reapply. Applicants must have expertise & experience as a consumer of public health, community member with lived experience in one of the areas listed below, or community stakeholders, including nonprofit organizations, the business community, and those regulated by public health. Membership preference shall be given to tribal, racial, ethnic, and other minorities. The advisory board shall consist of a balance of persons with expertise, career experience, and consumer experience in:

	i. Health care access and quality;	ii. Physical environment , including built and natural environments;	iii. Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment;	iv. Business and philanthropy;	v. Communities that experience health inequities;	vi. Government;	vii. Tribal communities and tribal government
Alison Fontaine	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Amelia Vader	X	X	X		X		
Ashley Thomasson			X	X	X		
Ben Twigg			X	X			X
Carl Isom-McDaniel				X	X	X	
Christine Espina	X	X	X		X		
Dab Shawver							
Markis Dee Stidham	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mike Cohen	X		X	X	X	X	
Nathaline Nivens	X		X		X	X	
Rachel McGarrity	X		X			X	
Robyn Phillips-Madson	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Shu-Ling Zhao	X			X	X	X	
CURRENT MEMBERS							
Joni Hensley	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Alan Lifson	X				X	X	
Guy Occhiogrosso		X	X	X			
Sterling Chick							
Chris Kobdich							
Kendra Cristelli							

Subject:

Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board

Date:

Wednesday, January 14, 2026 1:44:59 PM

Thanks for the email. I believe I have experience in health care access, social and economic sectors, business and philanthropy, communities that experience health inequities, and government. I have the most experience in social and economic sectors, business and philanthropy, and communities that experience health inequities.

Please let me know if there are any further questions.

Best,

Mike Cohen

Subject: Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board
Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2026 1:49:08 PM

Sure, I'll highlight the applicable areas:

- i. Health care access and quality;
- ii. Physical environment, including built and natural environments;
- iii. Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment;
- iv. Business and philanthropy;
- v. Communities that experience health inequities;
- vi. Government;
- vii. Tribal communities and tribal government

Christine R. Espina, DNP, RN (she/her)

Associate Professor, WWU Nursing Program
EspinaC@wwu.edu

From: Alison Fontaine
Subject: Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board
Date: Wednesday, January 21, 2026 8:46:07 AM

Good morning Jill,

My deepest apologies for the slight delay in response. I have been up in Canada on a long weekend without service and just returned last night, so I was unable to receive and respond until this morning. I do recognize that the deadline was yesterday at 10 a.m, and if there is no wiggle room around that I completely understand - but did want to try and advocate for myself as this is a position I'm incredibly interested in and feel passionately about.

Regarding the original request, I have extensive experience in all areas the council listed. Additionally, I hold a masters degree in business as well as a masters degree in public health, and did my public health thesis on social and health equity, focusing specifically on tribal communities in the PNW and the detrimental impact that the outpatient fee-for-service payment model has had on their access to preventative health screenings.

My currently role is working as a quality facilitator and one of my big projects currently is addressing health care access locally.

I truly hope this doesn't find you too late, but again - I understand if so. Please let me know.

Thank you for your time, happy Wednesday. (Also I apologize for any typos I'm writing this from my phone.)

- i. Health care access and quality;
- ii. Physical environment, including built and natural environments;
- iii. Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment;
- iv. Business and philanthropy;
- v. Communities that experience health inequities;
- vi. Government;
- vii. Tribal communities and tribal government

Sent from my iPhone

Carol Isom-McDaniel

Subject: Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board
Date: Thursday, January 15, 2026 1:40:15 PM

Jill,

Thank you for getting back to me so quickly. The three areas I would like to be considered for are below. If you require further information, please feel free to contact me.

iv. Business and Philanthropy

I currently serve on the Mt. Baker Foundation's Joint Grantmaking Committee, formerly known as the Equity and Health Determinants Committee. The committee funds projects and organizations that directly address health inequities throughout Whatcom County.

Since 2017, I have co-chaired the Northwest Clean Air Agency's Columbia Valley Air Quality Committee. Our work focuses on improving air quality through initiatives such as grant-funded wood stove change-out programs (replacing older stoves with cleaner and more efficient models), the provision of free heat pumps, and chipping events that reduce the burning of yard waste within the Columbia Valley UGA.

In addition, I founded and currently serve on the boards of two 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. The first, the Foothills Community Alliance, focuses on addressing upstream health determinants in East Whatcom County. The second, the Foothills Communication Hub, operates a newspaper, radio station, website, and social media channels to disseminate information between service providers and the community, and to highlight community members contributing to the well-being of the region.

v. Communities Experiencing Health Inequities

I reside in the Kendall UGA of Columbia Valley, a community with a high proportion of elderly, disabled, and unhoused residents. My work within this community spans direct service support—including navigating public assistance systems and paperwork—construction of wheelchair ramps for newly disabled residents, and coordination of a wood-bank program that provides 16–20 cords of firewood annually to low-income households who would otherwise lack heat during winter months.

I also organize bimonthly trash cleanup events through the local Neighborhood Watchdog Group, along with a variety of other service-oriented “helping hand” programs that strengthen community resilience and quality of life.

vi. Government

I am an elected Commissioner for both the Columbia Valley Water District and the Columbia Valley Park and Recreation District. As a Water District Commissioner for the past eight years, I have waived my stipend and worked diligently to ensure residents of the Kendall UGA have access to clean and affordable drinking water.

I was a founding member involved in establishing the Columbia Valley Park and Recreation District in 2016. In that capacity, and without direct assistance from Whatcom County, I supported the acquisition of the District’s first park and have continued to work toward expanding recreational lands through greenbelt purchases and related acquisitions.

I also currently serve on the Surface Mines Advisory Board, where recent work has included contributing to updates to components of the County Comprehensive Plan.

Thank you,

Carl Isom-McDaniel

Rachel McGarrity

Subject: Re: FW: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board
Date: Monday, January 19, 2026 4:32:02 PM

I have expertise in parts i and iii and experience in c and vi.
Rachel

Nathaline Nivens

Subject: Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board
Date: Thursday, January 15, 2026 1:13:18 PM

Here goes:

Yes - Health care access and quality;

No - Physical environment, including built and natural environments;

Yes - Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment;

No - Business and philanthropy;

Yes - Communities that experience health inequities;

Yes - Government;

No - Tribal communities and tribal government

Robyn Phillips-Madson

Subject:

Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board

Date:

Wednesday, January 14, 2026 4:24:54 PM

Hello Jill,

Thank you for your email. Below is the requested information.

Dear Whatcom County Council Members:

Thank you for this opportunity to share additional information. Following is my experience and expertise in the areas listed in the County Code:

- i. **Healthcare access and quality;** 27 years of practice in family medicine; 8 years oversight of a university student clinic. I've served on various healthcare quality control and improvement committees throughout my career.
- ii. **Physical environment, including built and natural environments;** As founding dean of a medical school built on the former USAF School of Aerospace Medicine in San Antonio, TX, I had co-oversight of asbestos abatement and renovation of four buildings totalling over 155,000 square feet. Included were spaces enhancing health and wellness of the learning community. I also supervised the handling of biohazardous materials and waste used in medical care, education, and research. I led the establishment of community gardens on university campuses in Yakima and the Southside of San Antonio.
- iii. **Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment;** Since 2007, I've worked in higher education at medical schools in Yakima, WA, and San Antonio, TX. I'm currently a professor of family medicine and public health and the UIWSOM's Master of Public Health Program Director. While practicing, I mentored pre-med, medical, nursing, and PA students. I've participated in public health/population-related programs and community health assessments. I currently chair the Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation which accredits all osteopathic medical schools and met with HHS Secretary Kennedy in September to discuss strengthening nutrition standards in medical education. Lived experience includes years of caregiving for my parents, advocating for a profoundly deaf sister with Parkinson's Disease, as a recent caregiver for my husband who is a disabled veteran, and as a senior citizen myself.
- iv. **Business and philanthropy;** owned a wholesale/retail business with my husband for several decades; have extensive fundraising experience for non-profit organizations and universities.
- v. **Communities that experience health inequities;** I was the faculty advisor of a group of medical students reopening and expanding the Yakima Union Gospel Mission Care Center (medical and dental care) which was closed for several years. To strengthen primary care access in rural areas, I led the establishment of family medicine and internal medicine residency programs at Skagit Regional Hospital. I established a medical school on the Southside of San Antonio in an underserved Hispanic community experiencing poverty and serious health inequities. I developed community, governmental, and health system relationships which resulted in the formation of residencies in family medicine, internal medicine, and psychiatry on the Southside of San Antonio; and built strong relationships with Laredo Regional Medical Center and a local FQHC resulting in family medicine and internal medicine residency programs there. These programs have significantly increased healthcare

access and quality in underserved areas. I applied for and received a grant for a mobile clinic in San Antonio for the medical school's Street Medicine Program. I'm a member of the Social Mission Alliance (<https://socialmission.org/>) which supports initiatives to reduce health inequities. I co-founded a non-profit organization serving vulnerable populations in Guatemala and have led outreach teams there over the past 25 years.

vi. **Government;** Served on the Yakima Health District Board of Health as a citizen member (2009-2013); Bree Collaborative member (2011-2013); served on the COVID-19 response team collaborative with San Antonio and Bexar County officials (2020-2022). Member of WC PHAB from 6/2023-present.

vii. **Tribal communities and tribal government:** partnered with the Puyallup Tribal Health Authority while dean at the Pacific Northwest University College of Osteopathic Medicine, resulting in the establishment of the PTHA family medicine residency program.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have additional questions. Thank you again for your thoughtful consideration of my application for reappointment to the PHAB.

Sincerely,

Robyn

Robyn Phillips-Madson, DO, MPH, FACOFP

425-770-1725

Markis Dee Stidham

Subject:

Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board

Date:

Saturday, January 17, 2026 1:40:38 PM

Greetings Whatcom County Board of Health!

Let me firstly lead by thanking you for your service to our county!

I fully understand the reason for specificity in this case, and welcome the opportunity to elucidate on my skill sets as they pertain specifically, to your needs in filling these positions on the public health advisory board.

As it is, when I filled out my application, I literally did so in the 11th hour, before the deadline, and made several grammatical errors, in my rush to submit my application, with literally four minutes left on the clock!

Apologies.

In that rush, I'm afraid I left out some key qualifying factors for you to review.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to be able to share a fuller scope of my experience and qualifications for the position.

I will now go line by line, in response to your very specific request for more information:

i) having been in leadership at two different local nonprofits, and as a samaritan citizen, specifically serving the homeless population in our county, and recognizing that population as comprised of a disproportionate number of folks from protected classes, including those with mental, and physical disabilities, it is a regular part of my work to navigate health services for these folks and liaison them to the providers they need.

This is very hands-on work.

Arranging appointments and giving rides to those appointments, and helping providers assess the need of an individual.

While doing that work,

I've had the emergency department at St. Joe's hospital contact me several times, asking me to give transport to someone who was being discharged.

My line of work has also led me to specifically represent individuals within the system, through the ROI, release of information, system.

This requires that I maintain a knowledge and observance of HIPA rules, and burdens/blesses me with a more intimate representation of individuals as they navigate our health system.

As you can imagine, this is very challenging, and personal work.

ii) While I find that my chosen advocacy is intersectional with all of these minutia of qualification, this one is definitely in my kitchen.

Living alone on Lummi Island, throughout my early teens and until I was 29, I lived/ rented under a number of very challenging, environmental scenarios, including living in a very rundown, fisherman's village,

(The ghetto) comprised of "vintage" tiny homes, as well as variously rehabbing run down old shacks for me to rent and live in, I experienced the full spectrum of housing.

From very well appointed homes with all of the amenities, to hauling my own water and using an outhouse for a number of years.

My experience allows me to advise on health and hygiene issues related to rough living, and also, a fuller perspective from which I can advise our board of health.

Of course, my advocacy puts me directly into the most challenging environmental living situations, where my experience has really helped to bring better health to those folks who we traditionally do not help.

I've built and served among just about any variety of household living situations that you can imagine.

Including sanctioned, and unsanctioned, life-saving emergency sheltering.

I mentioned before that my outreach through nonprofits, and through my previous government role on the hsw, which allowed me to go on, ride alongs with the bellingham police department, specifically during the pandemic, where my focus was specifically, on finding adherence to cdc recommendations, gives me a unique, and trauma informed perspective.

My experience on the hsw also put me into a number of conversations, and making recommendations about public health as it pertains to homelessness and those it impacts.

(All of us)

I could go on at length, but I feel confident that everyone on the board of health is aware of, and fully knowledgeable of my qualifications, in this category.

I would be more than happy to elucidate, at your leisure, and make myself available to you for any questions you might have in this, or any of the other categories here.

iii) Interestingly, this category is obviously even more "in my kitchen" than the previous one.

I believe that my unique experience again, working with our houseless community in the woods, in the streets, and specifically, having been one of the people who brought tiny home villages to our community, my work there was not only in making sure these people were safely sheltered, but indeed, pivotal to moving these folks into rapid rehousing, education, employment, and reuniting them with family, through a number of methods.

Navigating social and economic barriers, and the stigma, related to this demographic, which, again I remind you, is comprised of an inordinate amount of a protected class peoples, makes me an absolute expert in this category.

iv) In this category I also have some extensive experience.

Working with nonprofits has led me to deal one on one, with many philanthropic and business communities, while seeking and obtaining their support.

And also in community meetings where we were trying to place services within their neighborhoods.

I've come to understand the constraints under which many of them operate, their reservations, and moreover, through my advocacy, have become educated on what their expectations are, in their giving.

It has been an absolute pleasure working with these folks.

And they are, indeed the backbone of my advocacy.

My own unaffiliated volunteer work, also makes me, by default, a philanthropist.

v) Ironically, if the previous two categories, were within my "kitchen"

This category is where the rubber meets the road.

My sweet spot.

And because of the previous categories, and my description of their intersectionality with my chosen advocacy, this category is most descriptive of the fullest scope of my work, which touches on all of these categories very heavily.

It's fair to say that I have chosen to serve the very most inequitably compromised community members in our county.

Nationally, the mortality risk among the houseless, is 3.5% - 4.5% higher than that of the housed population, with a life expectancy of 20 years less than those who are housed.

I am definitely very experienced in trying to navigate these health inequities within our communities.

Committed.

vi) Government.

I know that I have spoken at some length about my experience on the homeless strategies work group. Appointed by county council in 2019, and unanimously reappointed in 2020. This is a point of pride for me.

I learned a lot about how government operates there.

On how to operate within a work group.

Procedures.

Methods.

Rules.

I forgot to mention in my previous application, that I'm also currently serving on the Whatcom County Ferry Advisory Committee.

This experience also has given me much better perspective on a very unique and individual community within our county, with very specific and unique needs, including navigating conundrums, like home healthcare, as it pertains, to ferry ridership, and the prolonged service outages endemic within that transportation mode.

I enjoy personal relationships with most of those in our county's leadership positions, and have extensive experience with liaisoning to the health department.

It's work that I already do, and I believe phab will allow us to have better conversations, and with better outcomes.

Efficacy.

vii) As a longtime Lummi Island resident, and as a local commercial fisherman there, and also as a home builder, I have had extensive relationships with the members of the Lummi Nation, where I worked by their sides, and have longstanding relationships within the tribe.

Also, some experience there, with leadership, as when I was with HomesNow, we helped to navigate the first specific tiny home encampment along lummi shore drive.

My work in placing people into shelters over the years has occasionally led me to their doors as well.

I believe that the Lummi Nation is actually leading our county on homelessness solutions, and we would do well to listen to them.

Living twenty years just outside of Deming, has also put me into more personal working relationships among the Nooksack Nation, and likewise availing our mutual clients of their services.

These relationships are key to my ability to serve this greatly compromised community within our greater community.

Again, we could learn a lot from these native nations, on how community can heal and reunite society.

To that end, as is expressed through county code, I too agree, that it would be most beneficial to have a member native community to represent a specific position on phab.

I do also know that it is difficult to fill these positions from these communities.

With that, I offer my limited experience with these local nations, as, perhaps in small part, meeting some expectation of representation of their needs, to the board, and perhaps even meeting the requirements of code.

With that, I conclude the qualifications, though not in their entirety, which, I believe pertain to your specific questions, and whether or not I am chosen for this position, it is my fullest intention to help with this work.

It's my sincerest hope to attain this position, to give more clarity to all of us, and hopefully, working together, we can come up with great policy to serve the entirety of Whatcom county's health related needs.

Warmly,

Ashley Thomasson

Subject:
Date:

Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board
Thursday, January 15, 2026 1:42:05 PM

Hello! Highlighted in yellow are my areas of experience. Thank you!

- i. Health care access and quality;
- ii. Physical environment, including built and natural environments;
- iii. Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment;
- iv. Business and philanthropy;
- v. Communities that experience health inequities;
- vi. Government;
- vii. Tribal communities and tribal government

Lydia
PLACE

Ashley Thomasson

she/her pronouns

Executive Director

p. 360.671.7663 | f. 360.671.7038



CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE:

This email is for the intended recipient only. If you are not the intended recipient, please delete this email and its contents immediately. Lydia Place cannot guarantee the confidentiality of either incoming or outgoing email. Please do not use personal identifiers or include sensitive information in your correspondence.

Lydia Place Acknowledges with humility and respect that the land we stand on today is and has always been the territory of the People of the Salish Sea.



Ben Twigg

Subject:

Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board

Date:

Wednesday, January 14, 2026 4:42:58 PM

Hi Jill,

(FYI, I think the deadline in your email contains a typo, since January 17 is a Saturday.)

My relevant experience and expertise primarily falls under iii. (social and economic sectors) and stems from:

- My current role as Bellingham Food Bank Finance Director (basic needs)
- My current role as Ferndale Community Services board member/treasurer (basic needs)
- My former role as Lydia Place Finance Director (housing)

I see overlap with other areas - e.g., my work with Bellingham Food Bank intersects iv. (business and philanthropy) and vii. (tribal communities and tribal government) - but again I would say mainly iii. (social and economic sectors).

Thanks,

Ben Twigg

Subject: RE: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board
Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2026 2:42:05 PM

Hello,

Here is the additional information you have requested.

I have experience and expertise in:

- i. Health care access and quality;
- ii. Physical environment, including built and natural environments;
- iii. Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment;
- v. Communities that experience health inequities;

I am happy to answer questions about specifics related to these topic areas.

Amelia

Amelia Vader
Grant Writer / Special Projects Manager
Bellingham Public Schools
Cell phone: 360-305-7624

Shu-Ling Zhao

Subject: Re: Additional Info requested for your application to the Public Health Advisory Board
Date: Wednesday, January 14, 2026 3:39:07 PM

Thank you so much for reaching out. I'd check 1, 4, 5, 6 in addition to what I selected in my original application as far as composition goes.

Have a wonderful rest of your day!
Shu

experience and expertise in:

- i. Health care access and quality;
- ii. Physical environment, including built and natural environments;
- iii. Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment;
- iv. Business and philanthropy;
- v. Communities that experience health inequities;
- vi. Government;
- vii. Tribal communities and tribal government

From: Joni Hensley
Subject: Re: Request for PHAB member information
Date: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 2:38:21 PM

Hi Jill. Here are my responses. I have included my other email for you since I tend to use it for my professional correspondence.

Please reply to this email by as soon as possible to let the Council know if you have experience and expertise in:

- i. Health care access and quality; **BSN from WSU; 10 years working for a family practice office in rural Whatcom Co followed by 30+ years as a public health nurse for the Whatcom County Health and Human Services (WCHCS) including infection control at hospitals and clinical services; currently providing volunteer nursing services for the residents of Kendall.**

- ii. Physical environment, including built and natural environments; **BS in Environmental Science from Huxley College; 10 years of Environmental Health Division as a health inspector (EHS certified) during my employment in WCHCS including pools, schools (including plan reviews), summer camps, food establishments, solid and hazardous waste disposal, indoor air assessments, playground safety (certified) and emergency response. Received certification in Healthy Homes Program through Building Performance Center.**

- iii. Social and economic sectors, including housing, basic needs, education, and employment; **Maternal child health case management included working with CPS & DSHS referrals to ensure child health, safety and basic needs were met.**

- iv. Business and philanthropy; **Current board member for Health Ministries Network non-profit; past board member and current volunteer with equine therapy non-profit serving youth in Whatcom Co.**

- v. Communities that experience health inequities; **Currently providing nursing services to Kendall residents in Peaceful Valley and Paradise Estates; volunteered for home food delivery at Foothills Foodbank serving this area for individuals who were homebound. Participated in Aging Well Whatcom meetings.**

- vi. Government; **Worked in governmental public health for 30+ years; worked at WA State Dept of Health during COVID**

vii. Tribal communities and tribal government; **Volunteered with equine therapy that took animals to Lummi school students and helped with their horse summer camp; Worked with Lummi Nation during UW vaccine trials for NovaVax.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share. Please let me know if you have any questions!
Joni Hensley, BSN-RN

From: Alan Lifson

Subject: Re: Request for PHAB member information

Date: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 1:16:40 PM

Hi Jill,
Here you go:

Yes to:

- i. Health care access and quality
- v. Communities that experience health inequities;
- vi. Government;

Alan Lifson

From: Guy Occhiogrosso
Subject: Re: Request for PHAB member information
Date: Tuesday, January 20, 2026 1:47:18 PM
Attachments: Outlook-xeuhljcw.png

Yes, for 2, 3, & 4.

Guy Occhiogrosso
President/CEO

