



HEALTH BOARD Discussion Form

March 30, 2021

AGENDA ITEM # : State Legislative Update

PRESENTER: Astrid Newell, Community Health Manager

BOARD ACTION:	Action Item	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion	FYI - Only
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The 2021 Washington State Legislature is currently in regular session until April 25. As of March 19, there are several bills that are still under consideration that may be of interest to the Health Board for action or awareness.

Public Health System

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased legislative interest in the state's public health system. Two bills that are particularly relevant for local public health are:

- **HB 1152 Concerning creation of comprehensive public health districts**
<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1152&Initiative=false&Year=2021>
 - Governor Inslee proposed bill that would dismantle current local health structure and create regionalized models. Creates a work group to develop and recommend to the Dept of Health Secretary a public health system that provides foundational public health services. Proposes changes to local health board structures, adding members with health expertise.
 - Bill has undergone significant revisions with input from stakeholders including local public health. Current striker bill removes many of the references to dismantling local public health structures and includes development of four regional entities to support local public health work and promote shared public health services across regions.
 - Bill is a companion to several public health funding bills.
- **HB 1340 Concerning creation of a statewide pandemic preparation and response task force**
<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1340&Initiative=false&Year=2021>
 - This task force would review statewide response to COVID-19 and provide recommendations for improving state pandemic preparation.
 - Bill was not approved by committee cutoff, but bill sponsor is working to accomplish the intent of bill via budget proviso.

Public Health Funding

Despite the essential nature of public health services in all communities, the public health system in WA State and across the country has been chronically underfunded. During the past year, the lack of investment in public health has been evidenced by challenges in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to ongoing legislative support for pandemic response, several bills have been proposed in this current legislative session to provide dedicated long-term funding for public health. The Health Board may choose to provide input to the state budget process related to stable public health funding. One example of a bill that is currently under consideration is:



- **SB 5149 Funding foundational public health services**

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5149&Initiative=false&Year=2021>

- Governor Inslee proposed bill that would fund foundational public health services with a per member per month “covered lives” assessment on health insurance carriers, Medicaid managed care organizations and third-party administrators. The resulting fund would be dedicated to public health with up to \$100,000,000/year in fiscal year 2022, increasing each year to a maximum of \$200,000,000/year in fiscal year 2026 and beyond.
- Current Status as of 3/19: In Senate Ways and Means

Children and Families

Over the past several years, the Health Board has committed their support for children and families in Whatcom County through the passage of resolutions, funding decisions, and adoption of the Child and Family Action Plan in February 2020. Several bills currently under consideration would provide support for Health Board priorities focused on young children and their families.

- **SB 5237/HB 1213 Expanding accessible, affordable child care and early childhood development programs** <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5237&Initiative=false&Year=2021>

- Referred to as the “Fair Start for Kids Act” this legislation would establish a new account for child care and early learning purposes and includes a non-exhaustive list of spending goals and strategies. It will expand eligibility and decrease copayments in the Working Connections Childcare Program (child care subsidies) and expand eligibility in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance program. The bill would also provide increased rates, training, grants, supports and services for child care and early learning providers. It would also increase the social safety net for families of children from birth until age 3, as well as for their providers.
- As of 3/19, this bill has passed out of the Senate and is being considered in the House.

- **SB 5068 Improving health outcomes by extending coverage during the postpartum period** <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5068&Initiative=false&Year=2021>

- This bill extends Medicaid/Apple Health coverage for new mothers to one year postpartum rather than current 60 days. This bill is in response to concerns about high rates of maternal mortality, particularly in communities of color, and other postpartum concerns experienced by mothers in WA State including behavioral health challenges.
- As of 3/19, this bill was unanimously approved by the Senate 46-0, and is currently in the House.

Health Equity

In November 2020, the Health Board adopted a resolution declaring racism as a public health crisis, and committing to take a variety of actions that promote racial equity. The State Legislature is considering several bills with a focus on equity. One bill that could impact local public health is:

- **SB 5052 Concerning creation of health equity zones**

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=5052&Year=2021>

- Requires the State Dept of Health, subject to funding, to designate **health equity zones** statewide and develop projects that meet the needs of each zone. Allows communities to self-identify as a health equity zone and develop projects. Defines that health disparities must be documented or identified by WA State Dept of Health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- As of 3/19, the Second Substitute bill was approved by the Senate 30-17. Currently in the House Appropriations Committee.



BOARD ROLE / ACTION REQUESTED

Health Board may choose to provide testimony or letters of support/opposition for bills or concepts under consideration by the State Legislature.

ATTACHMENT(S)

- *None*