

Healthcare Workforce Diversity Briefing Document
Presented to the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities
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Healthcare workforce diversity refers to a healthcare workforce that reflects the diversity of the population it serves.

CRITERION #1: MAGNITUDE

- In 2006, 76.8% of Washington residents were white, 8.9% were Hispanic, 6.8% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.4% were black, and 1.4% were American Indian/Alaska Native.
- While Hispanics make up 8.9% of Washington's population, preliminary estimates from a 2007 survey* of registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), and dental hygienists revealed that only 1.9% of RNs, 3.3% of LPNs, and 2.1% of dental hygienists were Hispanic.
- Similarly, Asians and Pacific Islanders comprise 6.8% of Washington's population, yet make up only 4.0% of RNs, 4.3% of LPNs, and 3.5% of dental hygienists.
- While 3.4% of Washington residents are black, only 0.8% of RNs and 0.2%** of dental hygienists are black. Four percent of LPNs are black—this is the only example where the proportion of healthcare providers in a racial/ethnic group exceeded the proportion in the general population.
- American Indian and Alaska Native residents comprise 1.4% of Washington's population, yet make up only 0.4% of RNs, 1.0% of LPNs, and 0.1%** of dental hygienists.
- In 2005, 78% of medical school graduates in Washington were white, 13% Asian, 2% black, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Native American.

CRITERION #2: ASSOCIATION TO HEALTH OUTCOMES

- Racial and ethnic minority health care professionals are more likely to serve minority communities; therefore improving access to care for racial and ethnic minority patients.
- Health workforce diversity is associated with improved patient satisfaction, improved patient-provider communication, increased patient participation in care processes, greater adherence to treatment, and increased minority patient utilization of needed health services.
- Improving the diversity of the health professions is consistently recommended as a strategy for eliminating health and healthcare disparities among racial/ethnic minorities.

CRITERION #3: DISPARITY

- In order for the RN workforce to reflect the diversity of Washington State's population, the proportions of Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, black, and American Indian and Alaska Native RNs would need to increase by 368%, 70%, 325%, and 250%, respectively.
- In order for the LPN workforce to reflect the diversity of Washington State's population, the proportions of Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaska Native LPNs would need to increase by 170%, 58%, and 40%, respectively.
- In order for the dental hygienist workforce to reflect the diversity of Washington's population, the proportions of Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, black, and American Indian and Alaska Native RNs would need to increase by 324%, 94%, 1,600%**, and 1,300%**, respectively.
- Women made up 92.4% of RNs, 89.2% of LPNs, and 97.6% of dental hygienists in Washington.
- In 2006, only 28% of Washington nonfederal physicians were women.

*Response rates for the 2007 surveys of licensed RNs, LPNs, and dental hygienists were 29.3%, 20.5%, and 34.5%, respectively.

**Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to small numbers.

Sources: (1) Washington State Department of Health (2007). 2007 Health Professions Workforce Survey. Pre-release of public use datasets, obtained August 27, 2007. (2) Washington State Board of Health (2001). State Board of Health Priority: Health Disparities. Olympia, Washington. (3) Institute of Medicine (2004). In the Nation's Compelling Interest: Ensuring Diversity in the Health Care Workforce. National Academy of Science. National Academies Press: Washington, DC. (4) Kaiser Family Foundation. Distribution of Medical School Graduates by Race/Ethnicity, 2005. (5) Kaiser Family Foundation. Distribution of Nonfederal Physicians by Gender, 2006. (5) Office of Financial Management. Summary Tables of Population Estimates by Age, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity: State of Washington and Its Counties – 2000 & 2006. Accessed at: <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/pop/race/summarytables.asp> on 9/5/07.