

Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities Statute Redesign

Current statute: [RCW 43.20.270 – 43.20.285](#)

Proposed Statutory Intent & Council Purpose (draft)

The legislature finds that health and wellbeing are interconnected between people, animals, and land. Health and wellbeing are different for each person and each community. Health and wellbeing consist of interdependent dimensions such as emotional, physical, occupational, social, spiritual, intellectual, environmental, and financial wellness. Supporting and sustaining good health and wellbeing require holistic approaches that uplift the whole child, whole family, and whole community.

The legislature finds that good health and wellbeing require individuals and communities to have access to power, opportunities, resources, and services according to their unique needs. The legislature finds that improving and sustaining health and wellbeing for all individuals, communities, and environments in Washington requires state government to undo all forms of racism and bias and heal wounds caused by colonization and other acts of violence and oppression.

The legislature finds that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities, women and non-binary individuals, people experiencing poverty, rural communities, people with disabilities, youth, and LGBTQ+ communities experience poor health outcomes that are unfair, unjust, and avoidable.

Centuries of colonial practices aimed at destruction of communities and cultures has resulted in historical trauma and intergenerational trauma that continue to negatively impact health and wellbeing in Washington State. Throughout history, state policies have systematically excluded people of color and other communities from the power, opportunities, and resources we all need to thrive.

The American Public Health Association recognizes racism as a driving force of the social determinants of health and as a barrier to health equity. Racism harms us all by causing dire impacts on public, community, and individual health. Studies show that race, income, and neighborhood location have a bigger impact on health than personal behavior, medical care, or genetic code.

The legislature finds that racism is a public health crisis and that the COVID-19 pandemic has made inequities worse. The legislature finds that recovery efforts should focus on building resiliency across the state, especially in communities most affected by racism and inequities. The legislature also finds that climate change threatens the health, livelihoods, and wellbeing of everyone, and it negatively affects specific groups more than others and often makes existing social and health inequities worse.

The legislature finds that achieving health equity will benefit everyone and will make Washington state more resilient to respond to public health threats, such as racism and climate change.

Health equity only exists when all individuals have the opportunity to attain their full health potential. The legislature finds that every Washingtonian has the right to achieve their full health potential, regardless of:

- The color of their skin;
- Where they were born;
- Their level of education;
- Their gender identity;
- Their sexual orientation;
- The religion they practice;
- The job they have;
- The language they speak;
- The neighborhood they live in; or
- Whether or not they have a disability.

The legislature finds that working towards health equity requires state government to be led by the inherent power of community, fully serve individuals with intersecting identities, and support communities in building sustainability and connection.

It is the intent of the Washington state legislature to advance health equity, wellbeing, and social justice through creating social, economic, and environmental conditions where all individuals and communities are free from racism and other forms of oppression and have full access to the social determinants of health, so they can be the healthiest version of themselves.

In meeting the intent of this chapter, the Health Equity and Justice Council shall partner with the legislature, the Office of the Governor, state government, and community to create a statewide vision for health and wellbeing as well as policy that promotes health equity.

In the development of this vision and policy, the Council shall share decision making power with communities who are disproportionately impacted by inequities that too often lead to negative health consequences.

The statewide vision for health and wellbeing and policy shall provide a framework and actions to the legislature, the Governor, state government, and community to advance health equity in Washington state.

The statewide vision for health and wellbeing shall guide agencies as they continue to fulfill requirements pursuant to RCW 70A.02 [Environmental Justice] and RCW 43.06D [Office of Equity]. The council shall collaborate with the Environmental Justice Council, the State Office of Equity, and other agencies, boards, and commissions to ensure state government efforts are coordinated, mutually reinforcing, and rooted in anti-racism, access, belonging, and justice and that these efforts benefit all of us.