



Final Minutes of the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities

September 18, 2024

Hybrid Meeting

Physical meeting at:

Skagit Valley Inn & Convention Center
2300 Market Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Online via Zoom

Council members present:

Ashley Bennett	Jennifer Helseth (Alternate)	Stephen Kutz
Alison Beason (Alternate)	Annie Hetzel	Elizabeth Perez
Courtney Cecale (Alternate)	Carrie Huie (Alternate)	Victor Rodriguez
Michelle Davis (Alternate)	DoQuyen Huynh	Cynthia Tamayo (Alternate)
Lydia Faitalia	Nicole Johnson	JanMarie Ward (Alternate)
Renee Fullerton	Diane Klontz	Jessica Zinda

Council members absent:

Benjamin Danielson	Millie Piazza (Alternate)	Greg Williamson
Willie Frank	María Á. Sigüenza	
Kelly McLain (Alternate)	Kendrick Stewart (Alternate)	

Council/State Board of Health Staff present:

Miranda Calmjoy, Health Policy Analyst	Gavin Rienne, Council Social Epidemiologist
Melanie Hisaw, Executive Assistant	Michelle Larson, Communications Manager
Jo-Ann Huynh, Administrative Assistant	Heather Carawan, Communications Consultant
LinhPhụng Huỳnh, Council Manager	
Esmael López, Council Lead Community and Tribal Engagement Coordinator	

Additional participants:

Edgar Franks, Familias Unidas por la Justicia
Elizabeth Gordon, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues & Employment
Rosalinda Guillen, Community to Community Development
Tobi Hill-Meyer, WA State LGBTQ Commission
Chris Hoke, Underground Ministries
Alfredo (Lelo) Juarez, Community to Community Development
Jose Ortiz, Catholic Community Services
Alex Sanchez, Underground Ministries
Genaro Sanchez, Underground Ministries
Melissa West, WA State Department of Health

During the virtual meeting, approximately 13 members of the public joined, and two people participated in Public Comment. The Council thanks everyone who took the time to join, listen in, and share their personal experiences and perspectives during the meeting.

The meeting was delayed due to later arrivals and technology issues. At 10:20 a.m., Victor Rodriguez, Council Vice Chair, asked the Council to formally delay the start time.

Motion: Delay the start of the meeting an additional 15 minutes to allow staff to troubleshoot technical issues.

Motion/Second: Helseth/Kutz. Approved unanimously.

Vice Chair Rodriguez started the meeting at 10:35 a.m. Vice Chair Rodriguez shared opening remarks and reviewed the Zoom protocol for the meeting.

LinhPhung Huynh, Council Manager, shared a video titled "[Movement for a More Just World](#)" by the Othering & Belonging Institute, the Safe Return Project, Sharp as Knives, and Be the Change. Vice Chair Rodriguez said the video frames where the Council would like to be focused and connected it to the Council's prior, current, and future work. Stephen Kutz, Council Member (State Board of Health), shared that communities have unique stories and should be able to define their own story in equity work.

Vice Chair Rodriguez invited participants to introduce themselves and to respond to the check-in question: **As the Council partners with communities to develop a statewide vision for health and wellbeing, what sort of stories should be part of that process? What's a theme that would be important for how we frame the process?**

Council Members, staff, and community members introduced themselves. The following themes emerged from the group:

- Who has the power to share their story?
- Listen to lived experience
- Lift up children's voices
- Lift up stories from our elders
- Stay united
- Build bridges
- Build allyship in unexpected places
- Make systems better
- Importance of creativity in systems work
- Focus on root causes of inequities
- It's a "big lie" that people with power know what's best for people without power
- People with disabilities don't have a lower quality of life than non-disabled people
- Importance of green spaces
- Make connections between climate inequities and interpersonal connections
- Human rights for farmworkers
- Rurality as a unique dimension
- Intersection of immigration status and health inequities

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA—POSSIBLE ACTION

Motion: Approve September 18, 2024, agenda.

Motion/Second: Helseth/Klontz. Approved unanimously.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES—POSSIBLE ACTION

Motion: Approve January 30, 2024, minutes.

Motion/Second: Fullerton/Faitalia. Approved unanimously.

3. COUNCIL BUSINESS AND UPDATES

To stay on time for the scheduled public comment period, the Council skipped agenda item #3 (Council Business and Updates).

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

Vice Chair Rodriguez announced the Council was transitioning to the public comment period and read from a prepared statement (on file).

Edgar Franks, Familias Unidas por la Justicia (FUJ), shared that FUJ is an independent farmworker union in Skagit County with affiliate members throughout the state. Edgar said farmworkers have been the “canary in the coalmine” for many public health issues (e.g., during the COVID-19 pandemic, they did not get access to personal protective equipment and vaccines like other communities did). Edgar referred to the idea of “sacrifice zones” in the Movement for a More Just World video that meeting participants watched. Edgar said that working-class people have been put into sacrifice zones, and that profit is prioritized over the wellbeing of working-class communities. Edgar shared that unions like FUJ have been shifting the narrative around farmworkers’ political and economic power. Edgar added that for the first time in Washington state history, farmworkers are getting overtime benefits and have influenced state rules on heat and wildfires. Edgar said that FUJ is looking forward to the fight to transform industrial agriculture, but they will need supporters along the way.

Vice Chair Rodriguez thanked Edgar for the comments. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that the [Washington State COVID-19 After Action Report](#) highlighted food insecurity and one of the workgroup’s recommendations is that food should be a right. Climate change is getting worse and we have to make sure we have a sustainable food system, including for those who cultivate food.

Jose Ortiz, Catholic Community Services (CCS), said that health equity work is a north star project. Jose said CCS’ focus is on funding behavioral health, food security, and addiction support services. Jose spoke about the importance of traditional healing and the possibility of resourcing elders and trusted messengers already doing this work.

5. COUNCIL REDESIGN AND 2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION —POSSIBLE ACTION

Vice Chair Rodriguez and Jessica Zinda, Council Member (Department of Social and Health Services) and Redesign Co-Lead, provided background about the Council’s redesign process and next steps for the 2025 Legislative Session. Linh reviewed the materials on file and said that Council Members have the opportunity to

discuss and consider a vote on the Council's draft proposal (i.e., request legislation to update the Council's operating statute).

Vice Chair Rodriguez said the Council's request legislation came about after a series of community engagement sessions. Linh said this year's proposal is very similar to last year's proposal, which did not pass the Legislature. The main changes are:

- Pushing proposed reporting deadlines back a year to keep the same amount of time to complete deliverables; and
- Adding the WA State Women's Commission and the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues & Employment to Council membership.

Vice Chair Rodriguez asked participants to share questions and suggestions. Annie Hetzel, Council Member (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction – OSPI), noted a typo in the proposed statute. Linh will correct it.

Member Kutz said that the American Indian Health Commission (AIHC) is requesting Council membership. Linh shared that the Governor's Office on Indian Affairs (GOIA) is the state agency named as a member in the Council's current statute and, in practice, GOIA delegates that position to AIHC. Linh noted not receiving a request from either agency to change that arrangement. JanMarie Ward, Council Member (American Indian Health Commission – AIHC), said that while the agencies have been in discussion, they have not sent an official request to Council staff. Linh suggested that the Council could approve the proposal as it is worded today, with the acceptance that AIHC can be added as a Council member during Legislative Session. Member Kutz and Member Ward expressed their openness to that strategy. No additional Council Members commented. Linh will follow up with GOIA and AIHC on this item.

Motion: The Council approves the legislative proposal, as drafted on September 12, 2024, and discussed and revised at today's meeting. The Council directs staff to work with Council leadership, Redesign Leads, Council members and their agencies, and additional partners to advance the proposal for the 2025 Legislative Session. The Council recognizes that specific language in the proposal may evolve during the legislative process due to legal and technical considerations as well as guidance from OFM, the Governor's Office, and others. The Council encourages staff to adjust specific language in the request legislation and proposal as needed, while honoring the intent, foundational truths, and core concepts of the Council's redesign process, as much as feasible. Whenever practicable, staff should reach out to individual Council members to share information and receive members' input and guidance.

Motion/Second: Faitalia/Helseth. Approved unanimously.

6. VOICES FROM COMMUNITY: COMMUNITY TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (C2C) AND FAMILIAS UNIDAS POR LA JUSTICIA (FUJ)

Vice Chair Rodriguez announced that the Council would hear a presentation from Community to Community Development (C2C), an organization supporting

farmworkers. Council Members, staff, and additional participants moved to the C2C office, across the street from the Skagit Valley Inn and Convention Center.

Rosalinda Guillen and Alfredo (Lelo) Juarez, Community to Community Development (C2C), introduced themselves and gave a tour of C2C's space. Lelo shared that C2C will be convening its 12th annual Farmworker Tribunal on January 21, 2025, in Olympia.

Lelo and Rosalinda spoke about C2C's work and various topics concerning farmworker rights and health.

- **Access to healthcare.** Lelo said that this is a common topic among farmworkers, and that language and financial barriers prevent farmworkers from accessing care when they need it. Rosalinda stated that farmworkers need access to preventive and routine healthcare.
 - **Language barriers.** Lelo said that healthcare settings have some interpretation services, but not always in needed languages. For example, their parents speak a native Mexican language, but do not speak Spanish.
 - **Financial barriers.** Lelo said that farmworkers represented by a collective bargaining agreement have limited access to union funds for healthcare. Lelo said that workers can only access these funds if they seek medical attention while at work, and these funds do not cover services outside of work. Lelo said that providing healthcare access helps not only farmworkers, but the whole community and state. Lelo emphasized that farmworkers pay taxes and they want to know why they cannot get health insurance.
 - **Healthcare coverage for farmworkers.** Lelo spoke about Apple Health Expansion, a limited enrollment program that provides health coverage for people regardless of immigration status. Lelo said that not many people know about this program and that it takes a long time for people to learn about changes like this. Rosalinda said this plan provides coverage for only 13,000 people due to limited funding. Rosalinda said that the state should make it a priority to provide farmworkers access to a healthcare plan, especially since they were deemed essential workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Rosalinda said that being able to access healthcare matters not only for farmworkers and their families, but also to alleviate community resources.
- **Climate change.** Lelo said that many farmworkers are getting sick due to climate change and heat-related illness. Lelo said that this past summer when it was very hot, many farmworkers felt sick but did not seek medical care because of the potential bill. Lelo and Rosalinda emphasized that climate change exacerbates existing health inequities for farmworkers.
- **Collective bargaining agreements (CBAs).** Rosalinda said that C2C tries to accomplish its work in collaboration with companies and labor unions, though companies do not have to be part of the CBA. Rosalinda said that statewide, there needs to be CBAs between workers and employers for basic rights without retaliation.

- **Priority actions for the state to take to protect farmworkers' health.** Rosalinda said that Washington State has done more for farmworkers than other states, but it has been the result of bitter fights where farmworkers had to reassert the same facts again and again. Rosalinda said that the inequities farmworkers face is systemic: they were designated as essential workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic and risked their lives to continue providing food, but they received few benefits for their labor. Rosalinda said that community services cannot keep up with the needs of farmworkers and their families, and more action is needed at the state level. Rosalinda discussed the following actions:

 - Linking climate change to cumulative health impacts on farmworkers.
 - Expanding funding for Medicaid programs (i.e., Apple Health and Apple Health Expansion).
 - Improving health-related data collected from farmworkers, especially regarding the cumulative effects of occupational exposures on farmworker health outcomes (e.g., liver cancer incidence later in life after exposure during youth).
 - Reporting data back to farmworkers.
 - Addressing industry impacts and barriers to farmworker health.
 - Requiring the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries to opt-in to the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL Act).
 - Addressing systemic racism in the agricultural industry. For example, 98% of the agricultural workforce is Brown, whereas 98% of farm owners are white and 97% of farms are industrial corporations. Rosalinda stated that the life expectancy of farmworkers in the U.S. is 49 years old, and the reason for that is systemic.
- **The H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers Program.** Rosalinda said that this federal program allows employers to recruit temporary agricultural workers from outside the country to fill workforce shortages. Rosalinda said that close to 400,000 workers are brought into the U.S. through this program, and there are close to 35,000 H-2A workers in Washington State. Rosalinda said that a condition of this program is that employers can only bring in H-2A workers if they can show a workforce shortage, as to avoid displacing existing workers. Rosalinda said, however, that there are no regulations on how to prove a shortage, and employers create artificial shortages by offering low wages and unfair contracts to domestic workers. Rosalinda said that in Whatcom and Skagit Counties, there are 339 H-2A workers, despite there being hundreds of people who line up to work when a farm announces they are hiring. Rosalinda said that this program causes local farmworkers to lose their jobs and access to healthcare. Rosalinda suggested that the Council look into funding sources for Washington-based farmworkers and the impact of the H-2A program on healthcare access for Washington-based farmworkers and their families.

Rosalinda shared hope that the Council will support equity, fairness, and access to high quality, preventive healthcare for farmworkers and their families.

Gavin Rienne, Council Staff, asked whether C2C works with research institutions, especially around data needs. Rosalinda responded that they had previously worked with a research center to survey farmworkers, but that data was tightly controlled at the institution due to funding and research restrictions, which led to frustrations. Rosalinda said that in many cases, the agricultural industry provides funding to research at universities, and data does not get implemented in practical, lifesaving situations. For example, data could be used to help doctors understand how to respond to pesticide exposures. Rosalinda noted, however, that farmworkers have said there is no way to prevent exposures other than to stop the use of pesticides.

Vice Chair Rodriguez said that there is a dominant narrative that we cannot grow food at a mass scale unless we use poison. Vice Chair Rodriguez reiterated that farmworkers are saying we need to stop using it. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that reinforcing and prioritizing our food systems could be important to the Council's work to develop statewide goals for health and wellbeing. Rosalinda recommended that Council Members watch Cesar Chavez's 1984 speech to the Commonwealth Club in California. Rosalinda said that it shares the same narrative: it is not sustainable to have a system that exploits people's bodies.

Diane Klontz, Council Member (Department of Commerce), said the Council has talked about using data to make decisions and this conversation takes that further. The Council should use appropriate data to make decisions.

Council Members, staff, and additional participants then moved back to the main meeting location.

The Council took a lunch break at 1:25 p.m. and reconvened at 1:50 p.m.

7. PUBLIC COMMENT

Vice Chair Rodriguez announced the Council was transitioning to the public comment period and read from a prepared statement (on file).

No members of the public signed up for public comment.

Vice Chair Rodriguez shared a brief summary of the discussion with C2C. Vice Chair Rodriguez shared hope that this was only an initial discussion and that the Council can continue these conversations as a part of its statewide visioning.

8. VOICES FROM COMMUNITY: UNDERGROUND MINISTRIES

Vice Chair Rodriguez welcomed Underground Ministries, an organization supporting gang-affected prisoners as they return to their communities after incarceration. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that the Council's work to create a statewide vision for health and wellbeing needs to be rooted in community, and that this conversation would hopefully be the start of many for the Council.

Esmael López, Council Staff, thanked Chris Hoke, Alex Sanchez, and Genaro Sanchez from Underground Ministries for coming to speak to the Council. Esmael said that Underground Ministries' work with gang- and incarceration-affected community members highlights important ways to think about health and healthcare access. Esmael said that they are engaging people who haven't been part of the conversation in the past.

Chris, Alex, and Genaro spoke about Underground Ministries' work.

- **Personal experiences.** Alex spoke about their experiences with community reintegration after leaving incarceration. Alex shared the difficulties of growing up in a migrant farmworker family and in a community where gang involvement was normalized. Alex discussed developing a relationship with Underground Ministries while incarcerated and their support with reentry after being released. Alex discussed being out of incarceration for five years, has a job, driver's license, and is about to start a bachelor's degree program.
- **Programs and services.** Alex and Chris spoke about the services that Underground Ministries provides including reintegration programs where community members can learn about issues affecting their reentry, such as legal financial obligations (LFOs), employment, and housing. Chris talked about their partnership with the Department of Children, Youth and Families, and the Child Housing Opportunity Program.
- **The importance of belonging.** Chris said that people in reentry may turn to addiction and violence for a sense of belonging, and Underground Ministries seeks to create a new sense of belonging. Chris gave examples of painting over gang paintings and taking an intergenerational approach by working with preschools.
- **Intergenerational healing and supporting youth.** Genaro said that the Underground Ministries team wants to disrupt the generational trauma they've experienced and move forward. Genaro spoke about reflections that led them to start O.U.R. Journey, a non-profit supporting gang-attracted and gang-involved youth. Chris said their team is helping to bring this program to schools. Chris talked about the stigma that migrant and gang-affected youth experience in schools; and how education and incarceration systems discard youth, which leads them to becoming gang involved. Chris also shared the concept of underground healing, which intervenes at the intersection of those systems to introduce healing. Chris said this intervention creates a pipeline of strength that undoes the migrant-to-school-to-prison pipeline.
- **Mutual transformation.** Chris emphasized the idea that everyone engaged in helping to heal their community does the inner work to heal alongside each other, rather than trying to fix each other.

Vice Chair Rodriguez said that it was an honor to have the Underground Ministries team speak to the Council. Vice Chair Rodriguez affirmed the intersections between the Council's and Underground Ministries' work.

Council Member Ward thanked the Underground Ministries team for sharing their stories and expressed being touched by hearing their reflections and motivations to create a path forward. Council Member Ward shared that early in their career, they worked for a California program that provided supervision to men under 25 who were incarcerated for the first time. Council Member Ward discussed being exposed to their stories and was struck by how difficult it is to overcome cycles of gang involvement and incarceration. Council Member Ward affirmed the Underground Ministries team's strength and courage in doing this work for themselves and future generations.

Alison Beason, Council Member (Department of Commerce – Commerce), asked if Underground Ministries has gotten support from Commerce for their work. Alex said that their position exists because of funding from Commerce. Chris said they applied for a new Commerce grant through the Community Reinvestment Program. Chris said that they didn't receive funding because Skagit County wasn't one of the six priority counties for the program. Alex said that Skagit County often doesn't get named despite being gang-impacted. Alex invited a future conversation with Commerce.

Elizabeth Perez, Council Member (Department of Health – DOH), affirmed the importance of Underground Ministries' work and shared gratitude for how it will impact generations to come. Member Perez said that working with reentry populations can be difficult due to stigma, lack of funding, and resources needed to support each person, and that there needs to be more funding to help people reintegrate into communities. Member Perez said that there are many intersections with the Council's work.

Melissa West, DOH, thanked the Underground Ministries team for their work. Melissa said that Governor Jay Inslee had recently added Washington State to the Reentry 2030 campaign. Melissa asked the Underground Ministries team if they had been a part of those conversations. Chris, Alex, and Genardo said they had not heard and would love to be a part of those conversations. Genaro discussed recently having a meeting with a local elementary school where fourth grade students were showing signs of gang involvement. Genaro said that it would be important to bring issues like this to the Governor's attention. Chris said from their perspective that working with North Sound Accountable Communities of Health, even reentry sounds like only a small subpoint. Chris said that folks in the reentry process are some of the most at-risk of violence, domestic violence, firearm violence, and homelessness. Chris said that reentry is an issue about widespread thriving for all communities.

Vice Chair Rodriguez talked about how these issues contain powerful intersections. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that there is a false narrative that we must incarcerate people to keep communities safe. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that data and stories make it clear that prisons do the opposite. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that many times, people become incarcerated after trauma from experiences with systems

based in racism and patriarchy. Vice Chair Rodriguez talked about another dominant false narrative that the burden of change is on the individual, rather than on the systems creating barriers to change. Vice Chair Rodriguez talked about the Council's responsibility to create change.

Vice Chair Rodriguez connected this discussion with the earlier discussion from agenda item #6 (Voices from Community: C2C and FUJ). Vice Chair Rodriguez talked about how the current food system exploits farmworkers as well as their families and children. Farmworkers, who work long hours, may struggle with not having enough time to support their children and the effects of poverty. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that one theme the Council should take forward for their statewide vision for health and wellbeing is how systems can improve to create healing and connection for those living at these intersections. The Council is driven by the principle that those who are most impacted by a problem are those best positioned to know the solutions, but these folks are often excluded from the table. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that belonging and power are connected; having power is what allows for belonging. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that people who are marginalized in Washington State need to have the power to make decisions about the systems that affect their lives.

Vice Chair Rodriguez would like a commitment from the Council to continue this conversation. Alex said that there are many people ready to do this work. Esmael wanted to bring community to this meeting to make their stories real for the Council. Esmael said that the Council must build deep, long-lasting relationships and trust to do co-creational work with community.

9. ECOSYSTEM MAPPING

Vice Chair Rodriguez requested that Council Members vote to omit agenda item #10 (Annual Update: Health Impact Reviews) to conserve time for the activity in agenda item #9 (Ecosystem Mapping).

Motion: Omit agenda item #10 (Annual Update: Health Impact Reviews) from today's meeting.

Motion/Second: Tamayo/Beason. Approved unanimously.

Vice Chair Rodriguez introduced the agenda item and invited Gavin to present on grounding frameworks for the Council.

Gavin delivered a presentation on Health Justice and Targeted Universalism (on file). The presentation included an overview of health justice and its principles, historical context, and applications, and an overview of targeted universalism and its strategies. Council Members requested a more in-depth presentation on health justice and targeted universalism at a future date.

Member Zinda introduced the Ecosystem Mapping activity, and Linh gave instructions for after the break. Linh said the purpose of the activity is to start

identifying actors, priorities, resources, etc. that the Council should incorporate when developing a statewide vision and universal goals for health and wellbeing.

The Council took a break at 3:00 p.m. and reconvened at 3:17 p.m.

9. ECOSYSTEM MAPPING (CONTINUED)

Participants split into two in-person groups and one online group for discussion.

Themes across all three groups included:

- Environmental health, the HEAL Act, and the Environmental Justice Council;
- Addressing poverty and the Poverty Reduction Work Group; and
- Safe and stable housing, including 'housing is health' and 'housing is a right.'

The online group shared reflections on the relational aspect of healthcare, health, and wellbeing; healthcare providers providing a human element to their care; expanding the idea of care providers to include families and communities; and ancestral and generational wisdom.

The in-person group reflections included the power of the Council; the ability to leverage power through large state organizations that have reach through their programs, grants, and services; doing community engagement work in a way that doesn't overburden communities; barriers to community engagement, such as lack of comprehensive compensation and finding people who want to share their perspectives with government; and ensuring systems are leaving space for community to be engaged.

Esmael shared that the in-person discussion was powerful and suggested the Council have an opportunity for more in-person discussions. Esmael talked about the importance of building trust and strengthening relationships with each other.

Vice Chair Rodriguez stated that a big part of the Council's success will be in leveraging collective partnership. The Council will be applying these learnings to its work moving forward.

10. ANNUAL UPDATE: HEALTH IMPACT REVIEWS

To manage time, agenda item #10 (Annual Update: Health Impact Reviews) was removed from the agenda.

11. ANNOUNCEMENTS, FEEDBACK, AND REFLECTIONS

Vice Chair Rodriguez invited Council Members and participants to share any announcements, feedback, and reflections.

Linh expressed gratitude to the group and the many people who made this meeting happen. Vice Chair Rodriguez recapped the meeting highlights and wished the group safe travels home.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Rodriguez adjourned the meeting at 4:33 p.m.

GOVERNOR'S INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HEALTH DISPARITIES

Victor Rodriguez, Vice Chair

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PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington • 98504-7990
360-236-4110 • wsboh@sboh.wa.gov • sboh.wa.gov