



Date: February 13, 2025

To: Members of the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities

Subject: Creating a Statewide Vision and Goals for Health and Wellbeing

Background

The Council's purpose, membership, and responsibilities are defined in statute (state law), mainly in [RCW 43.20.270](#), [RCW 43.20.275](#), and [RCW 43.20.280](#). In September 2021, Council members voted to form an advisory committee to make recommendations to update its statutory authority. During this redesign process, the Council and partners drafted request legislation with proposed updates to the Council's statutory authority.

The Council's request legislation incorporates principles of health equity, health justice, targeted universalism, and community participation. During the 2024 Legislative Session, the Council's request legislation was introduced in the legislature as [House Bill 2346](#). However, the bill did not pass. For the 2025 Legislative Session, the Council's request legislation has been introduced as [House Bill 1262](#) and [Senate Bill 5228](#) (direct companion bills).

If passed, [HB 1262/SB 5228](#) would change the Council's name to "Governor's Council for Health Justice and Equity." Additionally, the Council would be required to create a statewide vision and universal goals for health and well-being, as well as policy recommendations to move Washington toward achieving the vision and goals. The statewide vision and goals would be due to the Governor and legislature by October 31, 2027.

The vision, goals, and policy recommendations would need to:

- Provide an actionable framework;
- Recognize racism as a public health crisis;
- Recognize how climate change affects us all and exacerbates inequities;
- Incorporate the diversity of communities;
- Recognize intersecting forms of oppression that are barriers to optimal health;
- Guide state agencies as they implement requirements in 70A.02 RCW (Healthy Environment for All/HEAL Act) and 43.06D RCW (Office of Equity); and
- Work toward resolving negative structural and social drivers of health and promoting the positive drivers of health.

Furthermore, the Council would need to engage communities, so that people who are disproportionately impacted by inequities have meaningful opportunity and power to shape the outcomes.

As discussed during the redesign, some benefits of creating and implementing a statewide vision and universal goals include:

- **Moving the Council's/state's work away from a deficit focus and toward conditions for optimal health.** Agency staff are often asked to address gaps in health outcomes, but it is unclear what the ideal standard of health is. Additionally, simply closing gaps is not an effective solution. This has often been interpreted as creating parity with a demographic majority, however those groups also face significant barriers to optimal health.
- **Having a framework to advocate for systems change,** a vision for why that is needed, and a roadmap to get there. Focusing efforts on root causes and social/structural drivers of health can influence a multitude of downstream health outcomes.
- **Opportunities for alignment, collaboration, and action.** A vision can give clear priorities to help communities, agencies, the Governor, and the legislature make positive change. The vision and goals can also guide the Council's future policy development.
- **Inclusion for everyone.** If done well, a statewide vision can incorporate the cultural, linguistic, and geographic diversity of communities across the state to meet everyone's needs. This could help to build a coalition of health justice and equity partners, so positive impact can be multiplied and sustained.

Summary

At today's meeting, Council members will hear a staff briefing on possible steps forward for creating a statewide vision and universal goals for health and wellbeing. Council members have the opportunity to consider whether to move forward with the project (before knowing the results of legislative session) and, if so, discuss ideas for how to implement the project.

Recommended Council Action

After discussion, the Council may choose to consider, amend if necessary, and adopt the following motion:

Proposed Motion: The Council commits to creating a statewide vision and universal goals for health and wellbeing. The Council will strive to complete a first version of the vision and goals by October 31, 2027, while also working at the pace required for meaningful community and partner involvement. The Council directs staff to develop project plans and begin outreach to invite additional partners to participate in the project.

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