



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

February 13, 2025

Hybrid Meeting

Physical meeting at:

WA State Department of Health, Town Center 1 Building, Rooms 163 and 164

101 Israel Road SE, Tumwater, WA 98501

Online via Zoom

Council members present:

Linda Baggio	Jennifer Helseth	Vic Rodriguez (CHA
Alison Beason (Alternate)	(Alternate)	Alternate)
Courtney Cecale	Annie Hetzel	Victor Rodriguez (Vice
(Alternate)	Carrie Huie (Alternate)	Chair)
Benjamin Danielson	Nicole Johnson	JanMarie Ward
Michelle Davis (Alternate)	Diane Klontz	(Alternate)
Renee Fullerton	Elizabeth Perez	Greg Williamson
	(Alternate)	Jessica Zinda

Council members absent:

Ashley Bennett	Yolanda Geolingo	Millie Piazza (Alternate)
(Alternate)	Jessica Hernandez	Ed Prince (Alternate)
Lydia Faitalia	Stephen Kutz	
Willie Frank	Kelly McLain (Alternate)	

Staff present:

Jasmine Alik, Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator	Jo-Ann Huynh, Administrative Coordinator
Judith Barba Perez, Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator	LinhPhụng Huỳnh, Council Manager
Anna Burns, State Board of Health Communications Specialist	Michelle Larson, State Board of Health Communications Manager
Melanie Hisaw, State Board of Health Executive Assistant	Esmael Xiutecpatl López, Lead Community and Tribal Engagement Coordinator

Additional participants (41)

Maria Batayola, Beacon Hill Council
Wendy Barrington, University of Washington ARCH Center
Faduma Fido, People's Economy Lab & Just Futures Project
Elizabeth Gordon, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues & Employment
Tobi Hill-Meyer, Washington State LGBTQ Commission
John Levi, Community Health Care
Lori Pfingst, Economic Justice Alliance
Joana Ramos, Washington State Coalition for Language Access
Omar Santana-Gomez, Washington State Office of Equity
Melissa West, Washington State Department of Health

During the virtual meeting, approximately 41 members of the public joined and four people participated in the public comment period. The Council thanks everyone who took the time to join, listen in, and share their personal experiences and perspectives during the meeting.

Benjamin Danielson, Council Chair, called the public meeting to order at 10:18 a.m.

Chair Danielson gave opening remarks as a Black man during Black History Month. Chair Danielson said that when we come together as a community, we get to reclaim space and our voices. This is the Health Disparities Council—these issues and this time are relevant.

Chair Danielson referred to the following:

- Martin Luther King, Jr: “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”
- The poetic piece called “First They Came” by Martin Niemöller (1946).

Chair Danielson reflected on current societal conditions and said some people are facing existential threats. Chair Danielson said the forces today have the same roots as pernicious acts in other places. Chair Danielson continued that it should not have to be said, but it has become necessary to remind us all: equity efforts are not in a place of overreach. On the contrary, there needs to be real commitment—more community and people-based commitment—to address oppression across our communities. Chair Danielson conveyed that efforts to make health equity illegal are efforts to legalize oppression. Chair Danielson said the case has had to be made, again and again, by so many of us in different places.

Chair Danielson said we need to be moved by our conscience, knowledge, wisdom, ancestral wisdom, common sense, and sense of compassion and humanity. Chair Danielson encouraged people not to capitulate to things that seek to make profane the things that make us most humane. Chair Danielson reminded everyone that we are not alone and siloed in our efforts.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA—POSSIBLE ACTION

Motion: Approve February 13, 2025, agenda.

Motion/Second: Member Zinda/Member Johnson. Approved unanimously.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES—POSSIBLE ACTION

Motion: Approve September 18, 2024, minutes.

Motion/Second: Member Huie/Member Davis. Approved unanimously.

Council Members celebrated the retirement of Greg Williamson, Council Member (Department of Children, Youth, and Families – DCYF). They thanked Council Member Williamson for over thirty years of public service, including contributions to the Council.

Council Members and partners introduced themselves. Council Members made remarks such as:

- Communities are going through a very challenging time.
- It is difficult to know what actions to take without a collective discussion.

- This Council is where we get our collective strength, support each other, and build each other up. We stand strong in community.
- This group brings unity, and we are the center of health equity in the state.
- It is essential to know we will collaborate as we move forward. It is encouraging to look forward to what we can achieve together in the coming hours, days, months, and years.
- We and people before us have faced adversity before. The challenges now are another mountain we must climb. When we do it together, we will come out ahead.
- How can Council Members move strategically together? Let's look at health in a holistic way.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

Maria Batayola, Beacon Hill Council, spoke about environmental health and climate justice. Maria said the Beacon Hill Council represents 40,000 residents, 70 percent of whom are people of color, and they are plagued by environmental issues such as air and noise pollution caused by aviation and home heating fossil fuel. Maria said bold action is needed for state environmental health and climate justice tools, such as the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act and the Climate Commitment Act. Maria spoke about Senate Bill 5652 (Reducing environmental and health disparities and improving the health of Washington state residents in large port districts). Maria said this bill would require large port districts to include environmental justice as a part of their strategic plans. Maria said this would address gaps in the HEAL Act, which does not cover the Port of Seattle. Maria added that people have significantly shorter lifespans when they live near airports.

Dr. Wendy E. Barrington, University of Washington School of Public Health Center for Anti-Racism and Community Health (ARCH), spoke from a personal perspective. Wendy discussed Senator Rosa Franklin's role in creating this Council and shared support for the Council's work. Wendy spoke about the ARCH Center's work with grassroots organizations and Tribes. Wendy said health equity in public health is a strategic and resourced action to ensure all Washingtonians have the same opportunity for optimal health. Wendy said that sometimes bold action takes the form of continuing to advance a principled and participatory approach in the face of increased adversity. Wendy spoke about the need to remain steadfast in health equity work and urged the Council to share this perspective with the Governor and incoming Secretary of Health.

LinhPhung Huynh, Council Manager, brought written public comment from the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition of Washington State (APIC) to Council Members' attention. APIC addressed the November 2024 letter to then-Governor Jay Inslee and included the Council in the list of copied recipients. In the letter, APIC advocated for continued state investment in Hepatitis B elimination through education, screening, prevention, and treatment.

4. STRENGTH IN UNITY: COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

Victor Rodriguez, Council Vice Chair, encouraged the group to stay grounded in our shared values for health equity and justice. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that communities are experiencing a convergence of many social and policy issues, including those discussed in the Council's foundational truths for redesign (e.g., racism is a public health crisis). Vice Chair Rodriguez spoke about actions at the federal level that are having immediate effects on people's well-being, safety, and civil rights.

Vice Chair Rodriguez emphasized that where racism and policies divide us, unity is an important antidote. Vice Chair Rodriguez shared that coming together as human beings and community members can help to create a powerful foundation for our work moving forward.

Esmael Xiutecpatl López, Council Lead Community and Tribal Engagement Coordinator, introduced Priscilla, *promotora* (community health worker), and invited them to speak about her work serving communities.

Priscilla shared testimony about how heightened anti-immigrant forces are affecting the families they serve. Priscilla said people are anxious. They are hesitant to leave the house to go to work, are putting their education and wellbeing on hold, and are missing necessary appointments for health and other services. Priscilla connected these stories to the social determinants of health (e.g., economic stability, children's education, mental health) being impacted by national policies. Priscilla spoke about *promotoras* being first responders for their communities during the COVID-19 Pandemic and again at this moment. Priscilla said being a *promotora* is an honor and reflected on the resilience of *promotoras* and immigrant communities. Priscilla said there is strength in unity and that everyone needs to prioritize equity.

Vice Chair Rodriguez said that it can be easy to dehumanize migrants without personal stories like Priscilla's. Vice Chair Rodriguez said there are hundreds of stories from hundreds of communities around Washington State, from rural areas to cities and in between. Vice Chair Rodriguez invited participants to discuss the following:

1. What challenges are going on?
2. What are you working on or prioritizing?
3. How do we stay together and committed to our shared values?
4. In these times of fear, separation, and scarcity, how can we keep moving toward a shared vision for joy, togetherness, and abundance?

Vic Rodriguez, Council Member (Commission on Hispanic Affairs – CHA), introduced the [Rapid Response Hub website](#). Member Rodriguez said this resource uplifts information and resources (e.g., information about executive orders, the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network's resource finder, emotional and mental support resources) and is available in both English and Spanish. Member Rodriguez invited people to share additional resources via a feedback form on the website's front page.

Council Members engaged in discussion. Some comments included:

- Go beyond unity and toward solidarity, which means recognizing our common humanity, taking responsibility for each other's well-being, and being inclusive of everyone.
- When there are budget reductions, government agencies can go into a scarcity mindset where it becomes easier not to center equity. However, equity is especially important in difficult times, it is not something we do only when there are plenty of resources.
- There is much discussion about efficiency in government. Effectiveness is key to efficiency. Ensure systems work for everyone.
- The COVID-19 Pandemic has long-term impacts on student learning and contributed to workforce shortages due to declining high school graduation rates. There is a decrease in workforce diversity due to federal policies affecting migrants. These issues affect the healthcare workforce supply, diversity, and training in our state.
- Prioritize protections for people, especially for children, since they are the future. Adults need to create communities centered on love.
- Let's collectively maintain resolve ("stay the course"), not be silent, and move strategically.
- Show up in communities in ways that are clear and grounding, instead of adding fuel to the flame.
- Respond to challenges in ways that are transformative and not in ways that reinforce oppressive systems.
- Invest in community infrastructure, not just government structures. Some people, such as *promotoras*, frontline healthcare workers, childcare workers, and people who work in early learning, are not making enough money to pay their own bills.
- Bold action may not always be the most visible action or shiniest new idea. Rather, bold action can be the subtle and consistent things we keep doing despite adversity.

John Levi, Community Health Care of Tacoma, spoke about issues in the current healthcare landscape, including low staffing and increased encounters with people who need services. John said that community health systems serve people who are not seen in traditional systems, and that community healthcare is health equity. John shared about their agency's partnership with a local school district. They are building a pipeline to provide youth with training and support, so youth are encouraged to go into healthcare careers.

The Council took a lunch break at 12:47 p.m. and reconvened at 1:20 p.m.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

Joana Ramos, Washington State Coalition for Language Access (WASCLA), shared about WASCLA. Joana said communication access has been an outlier in most service sectors, and while there have been some improvements over the years, it is piecemeal and sporadic. Joana brought up example issues such as the state's Medicaid applications in English and Spanish, getting pharmacies to provide talking bottles for prescriptions, and the process for interpreter testing. Joana spoke about the need for a statewide office for language access that can do partner engagement. Joana said that WASCLA is a volunteer-run organization, but they receive technical assistance requests from many state agencies. Joana shared a blog post discussing the need for a state office of language access.

JanMarie Ward, Council Member (American Indian Health Commission), said the Washington State Department of Health (WSDOH) developed community partnerships at the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic, which have developed into thought partnerships. Member Ward described a conversation between WSDOH leadership and community thought partners. Partners shared concerns about the impacts of federal actions and state budget cuts, and how they could detract from the ability to have authentic conversations needed for trust building. Member Ward asked whether agencies have community groups that provide direct input on agency decision-making. Member Ward said it is important to have community engagement to know how best to serve communities.

In response to Member Ward, Chair Danielson said the Council could further discuss opportunities in Agenda Item 7: Community Engagement.

6. PRESENTATION: BEING WELL IN WASHINGTON—2025 & BEYOND

Vice Chair Rodriguez introduced presenters and highlighted some intersections between the Health Disparities Council and the Economic Justice Alliance, such as their mutual interest in working with communities. Lori Pfingst, Economic Justice Alliance (EJA), and Faduma Fido, People's Economy Lab & Just Futures Project, delivered a presentation (on file).

Lori described some of the EJA's recent efforts:

- Releasing a three-year impact report;
- Partners taking policy, program, and funding actions in alignment with the state's 10-Year Poverty Reduction Plan; and
- Advocating for policies such as community compensation, a working families tax credit, a covenant home ownership program, and local direct cash pilots.

Faduma spoke about the People's Economy Lab and their efforts with EJA on a community assemblies pilot program, which launched in Fall 2024. Faduma said the program initially received \$2 million in state funding to bridge the goals of the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, the Climate Commitment Act, and the 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty. Faduma spoke about the program's goal of convening frontline communities, historically excluded from the policymaking process, to discuss and address key issues in their communities by making policy recommendations. Faduma

said partners will work on implementing participants' recommendations. Faduma added that the program is requesting lawmakers invest \$5.5 million for the continued development of community assemblies.

Lori concluded the presentation by asking the following questions: What does well-being mean to you and the people you work with? What do you think of community assemblies as a tool? What opportunities do you see for collaboration?

Chair Danielson thanked Lori and Faduma for their presentation and opened the floor for discussion.

Melissa West, Department of Health staff, asked how the community assemblies project is implementing the recommended policies within the program cycle and how communities are involved. Faduma said that over the next six months they will have strategic conversations about how to follow through with implementation and that this will be an experimental process. Faduma said that the timeline will depend on the government's investment and may require some modifications. Faduma added that the community is involved through feedback loops in a process called collaborative governance. Lori said this work is a part of an international movement around well-being, and that co-governance and community assemblies are ways to build well-being together.

Chair Danielson invited Lori and Faduma back to speak about decriminalizing poverty. Vice Chair Rodriguez spoke about the Council and EJA's shared principle of centering community, which benefits health and statewide resilience. This principle can be operationalized through participatory engagement. Vice Chair Rodriguez said the Council's community engagement processes should do more than gather feedback once and, instead, should support continuous feedback. Vice Chair Rodriguez spoke about other tools to decentralize power such as participatory budgeting and policymaking.

9. 2025 REGULAR PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE—POSSIBLE ACTION

The Council moved Agenda Item 9: 2025 Regular Public Meeting Schedule to an earlier time on the schedule.

Motion: The Council approves moving Agenda Item #9 to 2:25 pm (to immediately follow Agenda Item #6).

Motion/Second: Hetzel/Klontz. Approved unanimously.

Jo-Ann Huynh, Council staff, shared the proposed 2025 schedule for regular public meetings. Council Members discussed and approved the following 2025 regular public meeting schedule:

- Thursday, February 13, 2025
- Tuesday, May 20, 2025
- Tuesday, September 30, 2025
- Tuesday, December 16, 2025

Motion: The Council approves the 2025 regular meeting schedule.

Motion/Second: Rodriguez/Davis. Approved unanimously.

7. COUNCIL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Vice Chair Rodriguez introduced and celebrated the new Council community engagement staff. Esmael Xiutecpatl López, Lead Community and Tribal Engagement Coordinator, Jasmine Alik, Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator, and Judith Barba Perez, Engagement and Partnerships Coordinator, introduced themselves and delivered a presentation about the community engagement team's strategic approach and goals (on file).

Esmael spoke about priorities such as supporting the Council's development of a statewide vision for health and well-being, creating a comprehensive community engagement plan, and strengthening internal capacity. Esmael shared some principles informing the team's work, including co-creation, participatory research, and power sharing. Judith and Jasmine outlined tools and strategies they will use to better understand the social landscape of communities they hope to engage.

Vice Chair Rodriguez thanked the team for building internal capacity before engaging with people and the realities people are facing, so that we do not cause harm. Vice Chair Rodriguez said engagement is not just about talking to people, it's about transforming our systems.

Member Ward spoke about the enduring connections the Council has despite membership changes. Member Ward noted the Council's engagement efforts possibly intersecting with those of the Office of Equity and agency partners. Member Ward encouraged everyone to uplift engagement models that have been effective through other challenging times, such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, so we can enhance and move those parts forward.

Chair Danielson said they are proud to be part of a space that models commitment to community. Chair Danielson expressed that this work can happen in abundant ways and is especially needed in challenging times. Carrie Huie, Council Member (Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs – CAPAA), shared gratitude for the Council's community engagement staff. Member Huie said that the more we put into communities, the more we get back through our own enrichment.

The Council took a break at 3:18 p.m. and reconvened at 3:22 p.m.

8. PROJECT TO CREATE A STATEWIDE VISION AND GOALS FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING—POSSIBLE ACTION

Jessica Zinda, Council Member (Department of Social and Health Services), provided an update on the Council's request legislation. A cornerstone of the Council's request legislation is to create a statewide vision and universal goals for health and well-being. Member Zinda asked Council Members to consider how the Council could implement

the statewide vision project if the request legislation does not advance. Member Zinda shared a possible motion for the Council to consider while discussing.

Linh delivered a presentation on the proposed project (on file) and asked for Council member input. Linh emphasized some ideas community and agency partners have shared:

- In previous meetings, Council Members discussed how a statewide vision could uplift and reinforce agencies' efforts.
- Advancing health equity and health justice requires everyone to work together.
- The Council could hear directly from communities about their visions and goals, to ensure that what the Council develops is reflective of community expertise.
- The Council would need to work at the pace of relationships, trust, and community partners' capacities as they weather the storm.
- Throughout the Council's redesign project, the Council heard many themes and recommendations for health, well-being, and belonging that could be used as a starting point.
- The Council may hear about pressing issues and intersecting barriers throughout the project. In some cases, the Council may need to consider what can be done on a shorter timeline to protect immediate health and well-being.

Member Ward said the proposal is beautiful. Member Ward added that it is timely, allows the Council to dream differently, and offers a path to progress beyond fear ("dream forward"). Annie Hetzel, Council Member (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction), appreciated the proposal and the principles behind it, and said this project is encouraging to look forward to. Member Hetzel repeated Linh's statement, "What have we not imagined yet?" Member Hetzel highlighted that Council Members would need to step forward and participate in work between quarterly meetings. Vice Chair Rodriguez said the Council is well positioned with great partners and that Council Members are signing up to contribute to this project if they approve the motion.

Motion: The Council commits to creating a statewide vision and universal goals for health and well-being. 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.

Motion/Second: Member Ward/Member Huie and Member Davis. Approved unanimously.

Chair Danielson said it is important to celebrate these efforts and honor the thought, approach, and conscience behind this work.

10. ANNOUNCEMENTS, FEEDBACK, AND REFLECTIONS

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

Member Ward thanked the Council staff for the day's discussion and said the meeting topics were necessary to discuss and centered around love. Chair Danielson said that this work is medicine. Nicole Johnson, Council Member (Department of Agriculture), spoke about the positive and filling effects from sharing today's space.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Danielson adjourned the meeting at 3:53 p.m.

GOVERNOR'S INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HEALTH DISPARITIES

Benjamin Danielson, Chair

To request this document in an alternate format or a different language, please contact the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities, at 360-236-4102 or by email at healthequity@sboh.wa.gov TTY users can dial 711.

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