

## **Health Disparities Council Summer 2025 Engagement Summary**

This summer, the Council's engagement staff spent time with communities at health fairs, other local events, and small group meetings. We listened to people's stories, asked questions about health and wellbeing, learned about access and barriers to resources, and shared space in ways that respected trust and confidentiality. Our focus was connecting with community members, leaders, and organizations, and lifting up the voices of people who are often left out.

In this report, staff outline our activities, some themes we gathered from interactions with communities, direct statements from people who allowed us to listen, our learnings and reflections, and how we would like to continue engagement efforts.

### **1. Short Interviews**

- Total completed: 82
- Locations/events where surveys were collected:
  - Tacoma BIPOC Health Fair
  - Sunnyside and the Yakima Valley area
  - Tacoma Marshallese Community sporting event
- Key Interview Questions
  - a) What does health and well-being mean to you?
  - b) What types of barriers are affecting you every day?
  - c) What resources do you wish were more accessible? Are there any resources you had no issues accessing?

From the 82 interviews, recurring themes and concerns were:

- Barriers:
  - Time constraints, especially for people caring for family (parents, caregivers)
  - Economic hardship: costs for food, rent, transportation, etc.
  - Lack of access to healthy food, healthy diet options, affordable groceries
  - Fear and anxiety related to immigration status, deportation
  - Lack of language access for non-English speakers
  - Physical health barriers: health knowledge, diet
  - Lack of mental health support, mental well-being
- Resources people want:
  - Job resources, especially for non-English speakers
  - More affordable healthy food
  - Affordable healthcare
  - Free or more affordable daycare
  - Health fairs, screening events, preventive care
  - Mental health services

- Health and well-being definitions
  - Strength/energy to care for self and family
  - Mental and emotional well-being, being “in tune” with one’s body
  - Balance: physical, spiritual, social health
- Systemic issues:
  - Fear of deportation affecting access to healthcare and social services
  - Lack of trust in being safe in public or with institutions
  - Immigration status making some resources inaccessible
  - Financial rights
  - Language rights

Below are some **direct quotes** we collected–edited only for clarity and spelling.  
Demographic information includes gender, age, and race/ethnicity.

*"Health and well-being mean having the strength and energy to take care of myself and my family."* - Male, 29, Pacific Islander

*"A barrier I face is taking care of others. I need time for myself."* - Male, 41 years old, Pacific Islander

*"Barriers that are affecting me is to change my diet since I grew up with an unhealthy diet."* - Female, 50, Pacific Islander

*"A resource I wish was more accessible is job resources, especially for non-English speaking Pacific Islanders."* - Female, 33, Pacific Islander

*"I wish healthy food was cheaper. Everything that's high quality is so expensive."* - Female, 38, Pacific Islander

*"Being a mom, active church member, working 12-hour shifts 4 days a week, and baking cakes as a side hustle, when can I exercise?"* - Female, 27, Pacific Islander

*"For me, health and well-being is being well mentally and emotionally, being in tune with your body, making sure all your body works together. Mental health is really important."* - Female, 49, African/Black

*"Deportations and the fear my community is feeling right now is a barrier that is keeping not only me, but my community really stressed. On top of that, everything is really expensive: food, rent, transportation. Thinking about all of this doesn't let me sleep at night."* - Female, 32, Hispanic

*"I am so afraid of getting deported. My family depends on me. I have to go to work with the fear of never coming back and hug my grandkids. I am afraid to go to the doctor and that they will ask for my status."* Male, 52, Mexicano

*“Barriers? Being an immigrant in this country.” -Female, 45, Hispanic*

*“There is not work anymore. I work doing whatever I can find. The weather is getting hotter each year, climate change is a big problem.” -Male, 47, Mexicano*

*“Barriers that are affecting me daily are financial hardships and the lack of regulation on drinking water here at Sunnyside.” -Female, 26, Hispanic*

*“I wish daycare was free for all and healthcare affordable; you have to decide between staying at home and taking care of your kids but then you cannot afford rent.” - Male, 42, Hispanic*

*“I wish there were more food banks, and health fairs like this one. Thanks to this health fair I find out I am pre-diabetic. Now I know I have to make some changes on my diet and exercise.” -Male, 52, Hispanic.*

## **2. Meetings with Community Leaders**

We held meetings with leaders across several counties to better understand community concerns.

- Mason County: Met with 2 leaders, one from the Q’njob’al community, one from the Mam community. Some of the key topics included: Indigenous health, cultural practices for health, and health access issues in rural areas.
- Lewis County: Met with an immigrant community leader. Some of the key topics were: the need for language access, impacts of immigration issues, and lack of trust in systems.
- Thurston County: Met with a non-profit sector leader. Some key topics were: attacks on the immigrant community, the need for shared resources, and family separation due to immigration enforcement activities.

## **3. Organizational Connections**

We participated in an Elders Fair organized by the Pacific Islander Community Association of Washington (PICA-WA). It was a free, inclusive event honoring Pacific Islander elders, featuring cultural celebration, resource sharing, and food. This was a very meaningful opportunity to connect directly with community members and the dozens of community organizations and businesses serving AANHPI communities.

### **Staff Reflections**

This summer reminded us that our communities are full of wisdom, even while facing barriers that are heavy and constant. People are clear about what health and well-being mean to them—having the resources to care for family, having time for themselves, being mentally and emotionally balanced, and being able to afford food, housing, transportation, and healthcare. What many share is that the real barriers are not about personal effort, but about systems that make things harder like high costs, lack of language access, fear of deportation, and not enough resources close to home.

### **As we continue doing this work, staff will:**

- Keep showing up at health fairs, cultural events, and other local gatherings so people see us not just once, but several times, building trust over time.
- Lift up community voices by bringing the words we heard this summer to Health Disparities Council members and partners.
- Strengthen partnerships with organizations already serving elders, youth, and immigrant communities, so resources can be shared and reach more people in community.
- Create more safe spaces for dialogue, especially for communities that are in fear and isolated due to the current immigration enforcement climate.