



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

May 20, 2025

Hybrid Meeting

Physical meeting at:

Federal Way Community Center

Banquet Hall (Alder, Birch & Cedar Rooms)

876 S 333rd St, Federal Way, WA 98003

Online via Zoom

Council Members present:

Victor Rodriguez (Vice
Chair)

Linda Baggio

Alison Beason (Alternate)

Courtney Cecale
(Alternate)

Michelle Davis (Alternate)

Lydia Faitalia

Renee Fullerton

Jennifer Helseth

Jessica Hernandez

Annie Hetzel

Carrie Huie (Alternate)

Nicole Johnson

Diane Klontz

María Á. Sigüenza

(Alternate)

Jessica Zinda

Council Members absent:

Ashley Bennett
(Alternate)

Jennifer Cole (Alternate)

Benjamin Danielson

(Chair)

Willie Frank

Yolanda Geolingo

Stephen Kutz

Kelly McLain (Alternate)

Millie Piazza (Alternate)

Ed Prince (Alternate)

Vic Rodriguez (Alternate)

Kendrick Stewart

(Alternate)

JanMarie Ward

(Alternate)

Staff present:

Jasmine Alik, Engagement and
Partnerships Coordinator

Judith Barba Perez, Engagement and
Partnerships Coordinator

Anna Burns, State Board of Health
Communications Specialist

Miranda Calmjoy, Health Policy Analyst

Marcus Dehart, State Board of Health
Communications Specialist

Lindsay Herendeen, Health Policy Analyst

Melanie Hisaw, State Board of Health
Executive Assistant

Jo-Ann Huynh, Administrative Coordinator

LinhPhụng Huỳnh, Council Manager

Cait Lang-Perez, Health Policy Analyst

Michelle Larson, State Board of Health
Communications Manager

Esmael López, Lead Community and
Tribal Engagement Coordinator

Crystal Ogle, State Board of Health
Administrative Coordinator

Additional participants (34)

Tobi Hill-Meyer, Washington State LGBTQ Commission

Elizabeth Gordon, Washington State Governor's Committee on Disability Issues &
Employment

Samantha Grono, Washington State Women's Commission

Megan Matthews, Washington State Office of Equity

Caitlin Safford, Washington State Office of the Governor
Grace Huang, Washington State Office of the Governor
Kristen Mitchell, Washington State Office of the Attorney General
Evan Klein, Washington State Health Care Authority
Faaluaina Pritchard, Asia Pacific Cultural Center
Marsha Botzer, Ingersoll Gender Center
Velma Veloria, Filipino Community of Seattle
Connie McCloud, Puyallup Tribe
Devyn Bell, Spokane Regional Health District
Mary Baechler, Washington State Board of Health
Molly Dinardo, Washington State Board of Health
Hannah Haag, Washington State Board of Health
Ashley Bell, Washington State Board of Health
Kelly Kramer, Washington State Board of Health
Frances Limtiaco, Washington State Department of Health
Omid Bagheri Garakani, Washington State Department of Health
Roxanne Garcia, Washington State Department of Health
Remeka Jones, Washington State Department of Health
Melissa West, Washington State Department of Health
Alesia McKoy, Washington State Health Care Authority
Dakota Steel, Washington State Health Care Authority
Abby Berube, Washington State Hospital Association

During the virtual meeting, approximately 34 members of the public joined. The Council thanks all those who took time to join, listen in, and share their personal experiences and perspectives during the meeting.

Victor Rodriguez, Council Vice Chair, called the public meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and shared welcoming remarks.

LinhPhung Huynh, Council Manager, stated that there would be an Elders Panel later in the meeting. Linh said that in honor of May being Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month, Council staff are gifting panelists the book *Kapaemahu* by Hinaileimoana Wong-Kalu, Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson. The book depicts the Native Hawaiian legend of four Tahitian healers' journey to Hawai'i. The healers were *mahu*, extraordinary individuals of dual male and female mind, heart, and spirit. Council staff then shared a video of author Wong-Kalu reading the book aloud.

Vice Chair Rodriguez invited meeting participants to think about the narratives in our current context and how they shape what is possible, especially considering the federal and state budget and policy environments affecting immigrant and LGBTQIA2+ communities.

Council Members and meeting participants then introduced themselves. Commissioner Tobi Hill-Meyer, LGBTQ Commission, shared that this is their last meeting with the Health Disparities Council due to reaching their term limit with the Commission. Council Members shared gratitude and well wishes with Commissioner Hill-Meyer.

1. APPROVAL OF AGENDA—POSSIBLE ACTION

Motion: Approve May 20, 2025, agenda.

Motion/Second: Klontz/Hetzel. Approved unanimously.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES—POSSIBLE ACTION

Motion: Approve February 13, 2025, minutes.

Motion/Second: Hetzel/Klontz. Approved unanimously.

Alison Beason, Council Member (Department of Commerce – Commerce), said they were mistakenly noted as absent in the February 13, 2025, minutes. Linh said staff would incorporate the correction.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

No one signed up for public comment.

4. STAFF, COUNCIL MEMBER, AND PARTNER UPDATES

Linh shared the following updates for the Council:

- *Vacancies on the Council.* Linh said that the Department of Health (DOH) and healthcare consumer representative seats on the Council are currently vacant. Linh said that due to these vacancies, today's quorum is 8.
- *Updates on agency request legislation and budget.* Linh said that the Council's agency request legislation received hearings but did not pass during this Legislative Session. Linh said that last year, the Council received a funding increase for the first time since 2006, and this funding increase was cut in half in this year's state operating budget. Linh said that Council staff will work with Washington State Board of Health staff to find solutions to this new situation, and that some impacts have already been absorbed by vacant staff positions on the Council. Linh noted that moving forward, there may be additional impacts to the Council's ways of doing business, including Council meeting and community engagement methods.
- *Health Impact Reviews (HIRs).* Linh said that the HIR team completed 7 HIRs in the 2025 Legislative Session, are currently meeting with requesters to get feedback about the reports and process, and are conducting outreach with legislators and other agencies to share information about the tool. Linh also shared that after their online request form stopped working during legislative session, the HIR team took the opportunity to modernize the form for the first time since 2013 and the revised form is online. Linh shared that the HIR team presented about their work on a national webinar, where they also learned about similar racial and equity impact assessments conducted by offices in Washington, D.C. and Montgomery County, Maryland. Linh shared that the HIR team will present their annual update at the Council's September meeting.

Esmael Lopez, Lead Community and Tribal Engagement Coordinator, and Jasmine Alik and Judith Barba Perez, Engagement and Partnership Coordinators, shared the following updates on engagement efforts:

- *Community engagement goals and budget impacts.* Esmael said the team is building their capacity for engagement work, developing a comprehensive community engagement plan, and supporting the development of the Council's statewide vision for health and wellbeing. Esmael said that the team is evaluating how to conduct meaningful engagement work in case the Council's reduced budget can no longer support travel, but currently, they will continue to be grounded in community and attend events in-person.
- *Engagement activities in April.* Esmael reported that the team partnered with a community-based organization to connect with over 100 community members at a food bank about their priorities and communication preferences. Esmael said that the primary concerns folks brought up were access to healthcare and fear of being targeted by immigration enforcement. In contrast, Esmael said that at a farmworker listening session two years ago, the primary concerns discussed were healthcare and the rising cost of food, and that immigration was less of a concern. Esmael spoke about the need to track impacts of immigration enforcement on targeted communities.

Linh shared additional informational updates.

- *April as Minority Health Month.* Linh said that historically, U.S. Congress has declared April as Minority Health Month, and this year, the National Association of State Offices of Minority Health (NASOMH) issued a statement titled [Commemorating Minority Health Month in Challenging Times](#). Linh spoke about the federal context affecting health equity efforts, including mass layoffs at minority health offices at the federal Department of Health and Human Services. Linh read NASOMH's statement that "this is not the time to retreat. [...] Let us hold fast to the belief that promoting health justice for all is not optional; it is essential."
- *Social Drivers of Health.* Linh said staff created the informational packet [Health Inequities and Social Drivers: A baseline overview and look at Washington State](#) for Council Members and partners. Topics include: food; housing; childcare and early learning; education; access to healthcare; behavioral health, social connection, and isolation; immigration; labor; criminal legal system; and climate readiness, adaptation, and resilience.

Vice Chair Rodriguez invited Director Megan Matthews from the WA State Office of Equity to speak about their guidance to state agencies. Megan Matthews, Office of Equity, shared the Office of Equity's guidance document "[FAQ on Equity and Washington for All](#)." Director Matthews said the Office of Equity provides guidance on how to operationalize equity. Director Matthews said that agencies need to understand the needs of various populations and shared a short video describing Targeted Universalism (TU) and how this practice can tailor strategies to different populations' needs. Director Matthews spoke about the Office of Equity's effort to build a dashboard describing health outcomes across Washington State, including data from various

agencies that work on the social drivers of health. Director Matthews said that the Office of Equity needs support in this work, that state agencies need to work together, and that those advancing equity need as big of a coalition as possible.

- Vice Chair Rodriguez said that one of the characteristics of an oppressive system is division, and that if we're not in solidarity, our theories and strategy do not matter. Vice Chair Rodriguez shared support for the Office of Equity and said one way to collaborate is through TU. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that TU calls for interconnectedness and solidarity with each other and the land, which is a culture that Council Members can express in their agencies.
- Vice Chair Rodriguez also spoke about data equity as another way to collaborate. Vice Chair Rodriguez encouraged having an agreement to present data in ways that do not recreate harmful narratives about communities, such as disempowering narratives that depict communities as victims or needing to be saved. Instead, data also needs to show power and resilience.
- Linda Baggio, Council Member (Health Care Authority – HCA), thanked Director Matthews for the update. Member Baggio said they want to uplift the Office of Equity's vision of centering community and creating agency around bringing government together, while moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach. Member Baggio said that TU takes the approach of "treat others as they want to be treated" rather than "treat others as you want to be treated." Member Baggio said they feel empowered and inspired by this vision as they step into their role as Health Equity Director at HCA.
- Yen Baynes, Department of Health (DOH), asked Director Matthews to share examples of how TU can work. Director Matthews directed them to a video linked in the Office of Equity's guidance document of John A. Powell discussing TU. Director Matthews said that government agencies cannot tackle federal shifts and achieve TU without working with community organizations.
- Esmael shared that Council staff have been learning about TU and highlighted the theme of duality and creating bridges. Esmael named the TU Community of Practice that Council staff are enrolled in as well as the DOH Community Collaborative's Community of Practice as spaces where folks advancing equity can share ideas and information.
- Tobi Hill-Meyer, LGBTQ Commission, asked Director Matthews how the Office of Equity's housing dashboard disaggregates data based on gender and sexual orientation. They discussed the need for as well as potential harms of providing that level of information. Commissioner Hill-Meyer said there needs to be considerations around data privacy, but communities also need data to get resources.
- Lydia Faitalia, Council Member (Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs – CAPAA), asked what support the Office of Equity might need from state agencies. Director Matthews asked for continued support and for everyone to be prepared for the hard work to come.
- Vice Chair Rodriguez said that community engagement can help gather stories to help us understand data and that many state agencies are required to develop community engagement plans. Director Matthews said that the Office of Equity was required to put together a community engagement toolkit and invited participants to provide feedback.

The Council took a break at 11:12 a.m. and reconvened at 11:20 a.m.

5. PRESENTATION: UPDATE ON FEDERAL EXECUTIVE ACTION

Jessica Zinda, Council Member (Department of Social and Health Services – DSHS), introduced Deputy Attorney General Kristen Mitchell to discuss federal actions related to health equity efforts.

Kristen Mitchell, Attorney General's Office (AGO), provided a brief overview of federal actions.

- *Executive orders.* Kristen explained that while federal executive orders are not laws and are non-binding, they have a lot of impact as they provide direction to federal Executive Branch agencies about how to do their business. Kristen said that executive orders related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are under litigation.
- *Federal funding.* Kristen said that there have been a lot of federal actions to restrict or cut off funding (e.g., stop-work orders, changes in the amount and timing of reimbursements). Kristen said that many of these issues have been subject to litigation by states, non-profits, and community organizations. Kristen said that agencies or community organizations with federal funding that is part of a statutory scheme or that has been appropriated by Congress should be able to continue being funded, but the AGO is continuing to monitor as things change. Kristen said that the AGO and Governor's Office are asking state agencies to stay in touch if their federal funding is impacted. Kristen said that it may be more difficult for the AGO to influence work around new or future funding that doesn't have a contract in place, but they still want to work with state agencies on this issue.
- *Legality of DEI work.* Kristen stated that working in the DEI space is still legal. Kristen acknowledged that actions at the federal level do have impacts on the state.

Council Members and participants asked questions.

- Yen asked if the AGO has issued recommended messaging that staff could use when interacting with community organizations and Tribal partners. Kristen recommended that state agencies work with the Governor's Office on messaging. Kristen said that we do need to be realistic about the fight for funding and that the AGO is putting in effort on this front.
- Vice Chair Rodriguez asked what opportunities the AGO sees in this federal landscape. Kristen spoke about the potential in partnerships between state agencies, community organizations, and Tribes, as well as between states. Kristen said that these partnerships can help align actions around litigation and policy, and that while Washington State is formally involved in 19 cases, it is tracking several dozen, and there are hundreds of cases. Kristen said that now is a time to work together and direct collective resources in a smart way since they may not be there in the future.
- Member Zinda asked about impacts to language access and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Kristen said that while executive orders are creating policy gaps at the federal level, federal and state legal requirements around language

access and ADA have not changed. Kristen said the state continues to do its best while acknowledging the changes in federal policy. Kristen encouraged state agencies, boards, and commissions to remain in contact with the AGO and the Governor's Office about how federal actions are impacting their work.

- Esmael asked if there were formal mechanisms for community feedback to keep the Governor's Office and the AGO grounded in community needs, especially related to funding and budgets. Kristen said that the AGO is trying to keep lines of communication open and are encouraging state agencies to share impacts of federal actions (e.g., if a certain funding stream is cut off, does that also affect community organizations?). Kristen said that the AGO hosts forums in partnership with state agencies and the Governor's Office, especially as their work is more on the legal side. Kristen encouraged folks to let them know about groups the AGO should reach out to.

6. INTRODUCTION: GOVERNOR'S POLICY STAFF

Vice Chair Rodriguez introduced two of Governor Bob Ferguson's senior policy advisors:

- Caitlin Safford - Healthcare, Public Health, and Behavioral Health
- Grace Huang - Civil Rights and Human Services

Caitlin Safford, Office of the Governor, spoke about their policy portfolio and the Governor's priorities.

- *Portfolio and background.* Caitlin said that they have a wide-ranging portfolio at the Governor's Office. Caitlin spoke about their background in community organizing on reproductive health issues and past work at the Washington State Department of Health, a Medicaid managed care organization, and the Washington State Hospital Association.
- *Governor's priorities.* Caitlin said the Governor is committed to health equity and working with communities of color. Caitlin said the Governor's Office wants to hear about what they can do and improve. Caitlin said that following the signing of the state operating budget, the Governor's focus will shift to monitoring federal actions, including impacts to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Caitlin said that the Governor's Office has not made decisions related to Medicaid in Washington State, and any decisions will be made in collaboration with community, state agencies, and legislators. Caitlin shared that the Governor's Office wants to hear about the impacts of these cuts on people. Caitlin said that the Governor has not had a chance to plan around healthcare and will be doing that in the interim.

Council Members asked questions and participated in discussion.

- María Sigüenza, Council Member (Commission on Hispanic Affairs – CHA), welcomed Caitlin and offered an open invitation to the Governor's Office to partner with CHA. Member Sigüenza shared that the community CHA serves has been very vocal about impacts of federal policy shifts.

- Member Zinda said that the Council has worked with multiple governors. Member Zinda invited Council Members to share how the Council would like to partner with this Governor's Office and Governor's staff moving forward.
- Member Faitalia spoke about CAPAA's interest in Health Impact Reviews (HIRs). Member Faitalia said that HIRs can be requested by the Governor and asked how the Governor's Office analyzes policy impacts to communities. Caitlin said that they have received email briefings about HIRs from Council staff and are interested in learning more. Member Faitalia spoke about the Council's origins and its recent efforts to modernize its authorizing statute. Member Faitalia discussed meeting with the Governor's Office to share community concerns and encouraged that HIRs be promoted further among legislators and the Governor's Office to raise understanding about policy impacts on communities.
- Michelle Davis, Council Member (State Board of Health – SBOH), said that as the Governor creates healthcare and health priorities for Washington State, the Council would be interested in opportunities to inform or help develop those priorities. Caitlin affirmed that there would be opportunities and said they would love to bring policies for the Council's feedback.
- Melissa West, Department of Health, shared that they manage the DOH Community Collaborative, which was created during the pandemic to ensure that DOH was meeting community needs. Melissa shared community feedback about the need to have community involvement during the development stage of policy, not just after it has been made. Melissa invited Caitlin to work with the DOH Community Collaborative to hear from community prior to creating policies and to inform the Governor's Office around health equity. Caitlin said that the Governor's Office would love to join these discussions.

Grace Huang, Office of the Governor, provided an introduction and spoke about their work. Grace said that their portfolio at the Governor's Office is related to civil rights and human services, including economic benefits, aging adults, disability, houselessness, and immigration. Grace spoke about their background in gender violence work with state and national coalitions and nonprofits. Grace said this is their first time working in government, and that they have a focus on Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander and traditionally underrepresented communities.

Presenters and Council Members continued conversation.

- Member Zinda said that the Council would like opportunities for partnership and collaboration to help shape health priorities in the state.
- Vice Chair Rodriguez said that it is important to have presence from the Governor's Office at the Council since community attends and participates in these conversations. Vice Chair Rodriguez said the Governor's Office can elevate policies coming from community. Vice Chair Rodriguez challenged the Governor's Office to go beyond receiving input and suggested methods such as participatory budgeting and community assemblies. Vice Chair Rodriguez encouraged the Governor to make health not just an issue, but a way to unify communities around shared experience. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that policymaking around health should go beyond healthcare systems and take on a framework rooted in the

interconnectedness of communities and the environment. Caitlin said health is important to every single person, but the healthcare system is not the most accessible or affordable. Caitlin shared that they live in a geographic location with limited access to healthcare as well and asked how we can create a healthcare system that is connected and equitable. Grace said that the Governor's Office has not had a chance to talk about their goals and visions for health policy. Grace said that access to health, home, land, and safety are important. Grace shared hope that the Governor's Office could integrate discussions about natural resources, health, and reducing trauma over lifetimes. Grace said that the Governor's Office has a framework and rules they must work within. Grace said they hope to integrate communities so communities can understand the rules and where there is opportunity for change. Grace looked forward to getting to know the Council better so the Governor's Office can hear what is happening for communities on the ground.

- Nicole Johnson, Council Member (Department of Agriculture – Agriculture), said that they sometimes meet with community members and needs to direct them to different agencies, partners, and spaces. Member Johnson asked how to ensure that community members feel cared for during that hand-off, especially in a time when communities are generally more fearful. Director Matthews said the Office of Equity is working on a related project and is available to support agency staff with hand-offs. Grace said all state agencies should have a policy advisor at the Governor's Office and offered to help facilitate relationships. Director Matthews said that Ombuds offices may also be good connection points.

Vice Chair Rodriguez encouraged participants to consider community engagement beyond seeking input and instead as rooted in participatory democracy. Vice Chair Rodriguez encouraged the Governor's Office to consider how power could flow from the Governor's Office to communities and what structures might facilitate that flow. Vice Chair Rodriguez said there needs to be continued investment in community engagement through structures like the Office of Equity, commissions, and state agencies. Vice Chair Rodriguez thanked the Governor's policy advisors and said that the Council looks forward to strengthening ties with the Governor's Office. Member Zinda invited Caitlin and Grace to attend future Council meetings. Member Zinda said the Council will need the Governor's Office to be involved with the Council's work and goals, including potential changes to statute.

The Council took a lunch break at 12:30 p.m. and reconvened at 1:10 p.m.

7. PRESENTATION: IMPACT OF FEDERAL PROPOSALS ON MEDICAID IN WASHINGTON STATE

Vice Chair Rodriguez welcomed the Council back to order. Member Zinda introduced Linda Baggio and Evan Klein from the Health Care Authority to present about Apple Health and the impact of federal proposals on Medicaid in Washington State.

Linda Baggio, Council Member (Health Care Authority – HCA), and Evan Klein, Health Care Authority, introduced themselves and delivered a presentation ([slides on file](#)). To

frame the discussion, Member Baggio shared the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quote: “Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.” Member Baggio said the discussion would break down the impacts of federal proposals and who is most affected – namely low-income people, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and those who depend on Medicaid as a lifeline.

- *Overview of HCA and Medicaid.* Member Baggio spoke about HCA and said it helps pay for healthcare for about 1 in 3 Washingtonians (about 2.7 million people). Member Baggio said that Apple Health is Washington’s Medicaid program and helps people—who otherwise can’t afford services—get medical, dental, and vision care, in addition to other services (crisis care, prevention, long term care, etc.). Member Baggio said that health disparities widen when healthcare access is out of reach, and that Medicaid is linked to social drivers of health such as housing stability and income. Member Baggio spoke about Medicaid enrollment and said that enrollment is higher in rural and economically vulnerable regions; that nearly half of children in the state are enrolled in Apple Health; and that older adults and people with disabilities rely on Apple Health to cover long-term care needs that other healthcare coverage doesn’t help with. Member Baggio said that Medicaid is a core part of Washington’s healthcare system and that enrollment is highest where health needs and financial barriers are highest.
- *Impacts of Washington State budget shortfall.* Evan said that the 2025 Legislative Session has just ended and that HCA staff are working to understand the state budgetary constraints. Evan said there is an overall budget shortfall and there are budget cuts to Medicaid.
- *Impacts of federal actions.* Evan said that proposed federal actions would place a strain on the Washington State system. Evan said the main actions are imposing work requirements as a Medicaid eligibility criterion; reducing the federal match rate for services and administration; reducing the use of state directed payments and provider taxes; and implementing a per capita cap on federal Medicaid funding.
- *Work requirements.* Evan said that work requirements currently exist for people on Apple Health Expansion, and that work requirements have been used in other states, so there are already examples of these impacts. Evan spoke about why work requirements don’t work for Medicaid, such as the fact that most people on Apple Health are already employed and that these requirements add administrative barriers. Evan said that any federal changes will likely include a work requirement and that HCA wants to partner with communities to incorporate these changes in the least disruptive way possible.
- *Reductions in federal match rates.* Evan said that Congress has proposed a reduction for states that provide funding to cover non-citizen populations. Evan said that Washington State could lose about 10 percent of its match rate for the expanded adult population (about \$400-500 million per year). Evan said this funding reduction would impact direct service delivery, as well as administrative services (e.g., client outreach, staff call centers) that help enroll and issue coverage. Evan said that agencies like HCA, DSHS, and the Department of Children, Youth, and Families would be at risk.

- *Reducing use of state directed payments and provider taxes.* Evan said that this change could put existing programs (e.g., emergency transport, maternity services, primary care) in jeopardy and limit new programs. Evan said this change affects hundreds of millions to billions of dollars coming into the state and will have impacts on rural areas and areas with higher rates of Medicaid enrollment.
- *Per capita limit on federal funding.* Evan said that a per capita limit would force Washington State either to increase spending by \$2 billion per year to maintain coverage and services or to reduce Medicaid services or enrollment.
- *HCA's response.* Member Baggio said that in sharing this story, HCA is thinking about the hard decisions to come, and that they will need to hear from community. Member Baggio affirmed HCA's commitment to protecting access and equity and said that they are prioritizing continuity of care, especially for marginalized populations. Member Baggio spoke about the steps HCA is already taking to respond including impact modeling, supporting the Governor's Office, creating a plan for funding and service protection, tracking emerging issues, and reviewing contract language to align with health equity values.
- *Gender affirming care.* Member Baggio said that gender affirming care will continue to remain protected and covered in Washington State. Member Baggio spoke about specific laws authorizing and obligating providers to provide gender affirming services.
- *Commitment to health equity.* Member Baggio spoke about HCA's mission, vision, and values, and said that health equity is one of HCA's core values.

Presenters and Council Members participated in discussion.

- Member Zinda remarked about the numbers shared in the presentation and said that many of those who would be impacted by Medicaid cuts are DSHS clients. Member Zinda invited Council Members to share impacts to their agencies.
- Evan acknowledged that these updates are disheartening. Evan said that the proposals from the Congressional budget are very targeted, and that the draft budget included further provisions targeting family planning, gender affirming care, and immigrant populations. Evan said that the impact will be very acute and that there will be downstream impacts as well.
- Marsha Botzer, Ingersoll Gender Center, said they were glad to hear the HCA's public commitment to gender affirming care as they have been part of efforts to make these services available in Washington. Director Botzer said that it was frightening to hear about the future to come and thanked speakers for their presentation.
- Member Sigüenza spoke about the impacts to undocumented immigrants and the need to unite for creative solutions. Member Sigüenza said that the need will only intensify and there will be downstream impacts. Member Sigüenza asked how the state could prioritize proactive actions like funding for clinics, community-based organizations to host health fairs, and initial health screenings. Member Sigüenza said there are many ways to elevate communities' voices and we should not wait for cuts to come to react.
- Yen spoke about impacts to reproductive health services and asked whether there are disaggregated data to show possible impacts. Evan said that the state invests in

culturally appropriate care access and began including doula benefits in Medicaid at the end of last year. Evan said that they do not anticipate this coverage being dissipated by federal actions. Evan then spoke about anticipated impacts to abortion and other family planning services. Evan said that providers in lower income, higher density urban or rural areas often serve populations with higher Medicaid enrollment, and their incomes will be most sensitive to rollbacks in coverage. Evan said they are not sure how this will affect access to care. Member Baggio said that federal proposals don't threaten coverage broadly but rather coverage for specific groups, namely BIPOC birthing people. Member Baggio said the presentation focused on system-wide impacts and the state needs policies that raise the floor, with consideration to targeted universalism.

- On behalf of another participant, Linh asked whether facilities providing gender affirming services that receive federal funding might face contradicting obligations and restrictions between state law and federal policy. Evan acknowledged that this is a reality that providers have been facing over the past few months and shared empathy with providers navigating this situation. Evan said that the AGO has been defending the state's independence with regards to healthcare access, but the situation has had a chilling effect. Evan said that some healthcare places have closed and providers are having to stop services because Medicaid funding is jeopardized. Evan said that some providers have been able to work through the courts to get injunctions and get payments for their services again, but overall, the situation is very disruptive for families and providers.
- Vice Chair Rodriguez spoke about the importance of getting accurate information to communities, as learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Vice Chair Rodriguez asked if HCA has information that the Council or partners could help share with the public. Evan said that HCA has materials online that they are trying to keep updated, but proposals are changing every day. Evan said that once a proposal passes at the federal level, HCA staff work to verify the information they share, provide context, and be responsive to questions. Director Matthews said that the Office of Equity is working on a hub to consolidate resources and can help connect people.
- Vice Chair Rodriguez asked if there is a strategy to leverage purchasing power to purchase upstream prevention services from grassroots organizations working with communities. Evan said that there are some initiatives where HCA works directly with community (e.g., Medicaid transformation waivers), but HCA staff will need to look into this more.

Vice Chair Rodriguez thanked HCA staff for their presentation.

8. PUBLIC COMMENT

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

No one signed up for public comment.

9. PANEL: COMMUNITY ELDERS

Vice Chair Rodriguez said the Council has the honor of hearing from elders who have dedicated leadership and service to the health, wellbeing, and rights of marginalized and resilient communities. Vice Chair Rodriguez said this panel would be an opportunity to learn from elders' wisdom so we can support communities and each other through challenging times.

Esmael said that we've been talking all day about difficulties, and this panel is about perspective. Esmael said that generations have faced challenges since time immemorial and shared the story, "Flows in from the Stars" by Gerry Himmelreich (Bois Forte Ojibwe). Esmael said that Council staff have invited these elders so their wisdom and perspectives can shape the Council's work.

Council staff introduced panelists:

- Marsha Botzer, Ingersoll Gender Center
- Connie McCloud, Puyallup Tribe
- Faaluaia "Lua" Pritchard, Asia Pacific Cultural Center
- Velma Veloria, Filipino Community of Seattle

Jasmine and Judith facilitated the panel discussion. Panelists responded to the following questions:

- What are the most significant challenges that your community is facing right now?
- What strategies have you and your community used during difficult times?
- What helped you maintain a sense of hope or resilience during challenging social periods?
- What are the hopes and dreams of your youth? What advice would you give to younger generations facing social and political challenges today?

Question 1: What are the most significant challenges that your community is facing right now?

Lua Pritchard, Asia Pacific Cultural Center (APCC), spoke about issues from their Asia Pacific (AP) community.

- **Healthcare access.** Director Pritchard said that healthcare access is very challenging for the AP community. Director Pritchard said that the AP community is mostly immigrants and refugees and face specific concerns (e.g., lack of language access; lack of knowledge of services; and feeling intimidated by or mistrustful of government services and healthcare providers).
- **Gun violence and youth mental health.** Director Pritchard spoke about gun violence and youth mental health. Director Pritchard spoke about some of the contexts that youth experience and said that APCC has a mental health program to help address this issue. Director Pritchard said that mental health is a newer topic to AP communities and spoke about the need to get rid of stigma around mental health issues.

- *Affordable housing.* Director Pritchard said that AP people are becoming increasingly houseless. Director Pritchard said that Tacoma will open 70 affordable housing units, but AP people don't typically qualify.
- *Food insecurity.* Director Pritchard spoke about food insecurity experienced by AP students in schools and the lack of access to culturally relevant food.
- *Immigration.* Director Pritchard said that many members of the community have concerns about federal immigration enforcement.
- *Infant mortality.* Director Pritchard said that infant mortality is a concern in the AP community and that many young pregnant people do not know where to turn for assistance.

Connie McCloud, Puyallup Tribe, shared concerns from their Native community.

- *Murdered and missing Indigenous women.* Elder McCloud said that May 5 was a National Day for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirited People (MMIWG2S). Elder McCloud spoke about issues connected to the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women crisis, including domestic violence, human trafficking, and substance use disorder.
- *Maternal mortality.* Elder McCloud spoke about issues related to the maternal mortality crisis in Native communities. Elder McCloud said that there are mothers who struggle with substance use disorder and houselessness. Sometimes intervention only happens after the mother has passed away after giving birth and the baby ends up in the foster care system. Elder McCloud spoke about the need for more outreach and support for mothers, birthing people, and children.
- *Culture as resilience.* Elder McCloud said that safety is connected to culture, traditions, and values. Elder McCloud said that one of their responsibilities is to help with traditional customs and that in a few days, the Puyallup Tribe would celebrate the first opening of a traditional longhouse in over 300 years. Elder McCloud spoke about the history of longhouses and said that much of their Tribe's culture has been destroyed. Elder McCloud spoke about the significance of land and water to the Puyallup Tribe and shared how the celebration would honor the Tribe's relationship with food, salmon, and water. Elder McCloud said these celebrations help bring the community together and create a sense of pride for their community.
- *Tribal health and community services.* Elder McCloud said the Puyallup Tribe offers services for physical, mental, and OBGYN health, and assisted living centers for elders.
- *Quality of life.* Elder McCloud said that elders and young people receive income via Tribal per capita distributions and are at risk of being targeted or taken advantage of. Elder McCloud said the Tribe's goal is to have a quality standard of living for everyone, from children to elders.

Marsha Botzer, Ingersoll Gender Center, spoke about attacks on the transgender (trans) community.

- Director Botzer said that in their lifetime, trans people have risen from being invisible and oppressed to visible and having rights, such as in marriage and healthcare. Director Botzer honored the attacks that other communities have experienced.

- Director Botzer spoke about the current attacks aimed at trans people's ability to have passports and other forms of identification, culture, and healthcare, which the community fought to have for many years. Director Botzer said that some providers are afraid to provide trans health services, and community members are afraid to ask for them for fear of being persecuted. Director Botzer said that attacks on the trans community extend beyond documents and healthcare, and that trans people can be arrested in places like Texas or Florida.
- Director Botzer said that the trans community was underground at the start of their work and may need to go there again, but they will never stop being and doing. Director Botzer said that people are continuing to rise and establishing forms of care such as grief groups. Director Botzer said they hope that the community will do what it has in the past to find each other, stay in touch, and build community.

Question 2: What strategies have you and your community used during difficult times?

Director Pritchard spoke about reaching out to partners and using culturally and linguistically appropriate resources. Director Pritchard said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no way health departments could have provided language access without community, so the government had to reach out and community had to step up. Director Pritchard said that this provided a bridge between community and government. Director Pritchard said that to address food insecurity, APCC has reached out to partners like farmer's markets, food banks, and churches. Director Pritchard said that APCC also works closely with the Pierce County School District, speaks with parents, and teaches students about their culture.

Elder McCloud said that the Puyallup Tribe uses talking circles to bring people together over food. Elder McCloud said that over 50 years ago, the community would come together in a church basement to practice song and dance and share a meal, and that held the community together. Elder McCloud said that at other times, the community would hold ceremonial sweat lodges to share food, spirituality, and support. Elder McCloud spoke about the importance of connections, such as checking in on each other. Elder McCloud said that today there are still aunties and uncles in the community who provide safe spaces for young people, even if they are not biologically related. Elder McCloud said these are the relationships that the community needs.

Director Botzer said that LGBTQ communities form support systems to help each other. Director Botzer said that these support networks help community members understand themselves first and foremost, as well as take care of each other, learn, show up politically, and act in unity.

Velma Veloria, Filipino Community of Seattle (FCS), said that FCS organizes, builds allies, and has sensitivity to take care of elders. Velma spoke about FCS' work and services. Velma said that FCS serves around 7,000 people in the Seattle area and has built 94 units of affordable housing for seniors. Velma said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many Filipino healthcare workers were on the frontlines and so while they

were only one percent of the healthcare workforce, they comprised 40 percent of deaths. Velma said that during the pandemic, FCS educated communities about COVID-19, gathered pharmacists to host vaccine clinics, and ensured elders were masked so they could get vaccinated. Velma said that FCS also offers a culturally appropriate senior lunch program and organized people to deliver lunches door-to-door during the pandemic.

Question 3: What helped you maintain a sense of hope or resilience during challenging social periods?

Velma said that their community helps provide a sense of home and love.

Director Pritchard said that they love to represent their community and bring people together—mobilizing people to come to a safe place where they can be happy and learn about each other. Director Pritchard said that APCC hosts many cultural events to allow people to get to know AP communities. Director Pritchard spoke about the importance of culturally appropriate food and added that government events need food that communities want to eat.

Elder McCloud spoke about the importance of spirituality for Native communities. Elder McCloud said that we are all connected and share things in common with others, and Native communities recognize this through prayer, ceremony, and coming together. Elder McCloud said that their community even tells the berries they pick about their intent and thank the berries for offering their life. Elder McCloud spoke about the intent of spirituality and connectedness that their ancestors knew. Elder McCloud said that many times when a Tribal member approaches someone's house, they knock to let the person inside know they are there, then wait to speak so their ancestors' spirits can arrive and share why they are there. Elder McCloud said that they look to their spirit in times of conflict as a reminder to be honest. Elder McCloud said that we all need to take care of our spirits and each other and that we are all related.

Director Botzer spoke about their experience dropping out of school and joining a labor union. Director Botzer shared lessons from the trade union anthem "Solidarity Forever": there's no weaker power than the strength of one, and no power greater under the sun than the union, and the labor slogan: "When we fight, we win." Director Botzer said these lessons have kept them going under hard circumstances. Director Botzer spoke about creating together and said that when the things communities need aren't there, communities will create it themselves (e.g., gender affirming laws, unity between communities, programs). Director Botzer said to recognize that there are organizations that have been around and fighting for a long time.

Question 4: What are the hopes and dreams of your youth? What advice would you give to younger generations facing social and political challenges today?

Director Pritchard spoke about experiences with the APCC's youth program. Director Pritchard said that many AP youth feel like they don't have dreams. Director Pritchard

said that many feel lost and confused and struggle in school, but want good things for themselves and need support. Director Pritchard said that APCC works with these youth every day to provide them with care and love. Director Pritchard said that APCC also works with parents to help them understand what's going on with their children. Director Pritchard said that community leaders need to stay strong and have love to help young people know who they are. Director Pritchard spoke about the difficulties young AP people face growing up in the United States, being separated from their culture and history, and struggling with their families. Director Pritchard said that APCC knows the value of having a safe and happy place for their community to trust and gather in. Director Pritchard said that they work to provide this place every single day, and that it is constant, difficult work, but that they cannot give up because it is so wonderful to see young people who have hopes and dreams.

Elder McCloud said that over 30 years ago, they traveled to Vancouver, British Columbia, for their first canoe journey. Elder McCloud shared that this year will be the 32 journey. Elder McCloud stated that the canoe journey is an annual youth event designed to promote leadership among young people by teaching them about traditional culture and protocols. Elder McCloud said the youth took the teachings to heart and excelled. Elder McCloud said that after the canoe journey ended, many families said that leadership has no idea of how many lives they saved by giving their kids this experience. Elder McCloud said that when this year's canoe journey had to be cancelled, the Puyallup Tribe gathered youth with their elders and families and challenged them to talk about the questions: "Who are you? Where do you come from? Who is your family? How are you related to all of these other people?" Elder McCloud said that their Tribe continues to grow.

Velma (former WA State Representative) said that they never hoped and dreamed of becoming an elected legislator. Velma spoke about growing up during a time of conflicts in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Philippines, and El Salvador. Velma said they joined a political movement and learned what capitalism and imperialism meant, how to do an analysis, and how to create a leaflet. Velma said that at this point in life, they want to share their experiences so others can take up the work and that they do this with their class at the University of Washington. Velma said that they encourage youth to be open to opportunities that the spirits have to offer and to be grounded in community and values.

Director Botzer said that many young people who struggle with questions of identity and belonging don't always know about available resources. Director Botzer said that once a young person learns that resources are available, they realize there is more out there and start to feel better.

Esmael said that these stories build our relationships with one another and shared gratitude with the panelists for telling their stories. Esmael said that they learned from one of their elders: "When you hear a story, don't change a thing—not a word, not even a breath." Esmael said that was how they learned stories from their community.

Director Pritchard said they had served on this Council from the beginning and shared well wishes from former Senator Rosa Franklin, who led efforts to create the Council. Director Pritchard said that their wish for the Council is to advise the Governor on how communities can be happy and healthy, and to work with communities to get input. Director Pritchard thanked the Council for its work.

Velma recognized Consuelo Guandique, who attended an earlier portion of the Council meeting. Velma said that Consuelo has been involved in the farmworker movement and that people like Consuelo give them the strength to continue.

Vice Chair Rodriguez shared concluding remarks. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that oppression weaponizes our identities to divide us, and that part of the work is reclaiming our identities and sense of who we are. Vice Chair Rodriguez spoke about the importance of relationships for health. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that this work is generational and that people have been fighting for over 300 years. Vice Chair Rodriguez said we must intentionally change the culture and offer youth and elders roles in our communities.

Elders, Council Members, staff, and other attendees took a group photo to commemorate the occasion.

10. DISCUSSION: DEVELOPING A STATEWIDE VISION FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

This item was skipped due to time.

11. ANNOUNCEMENTS, FEEDBACK, AND REFLECTIONS

Vice Chair Rodriguez thanked everyone for their time and prompted the Council to be intentional about harvesting the lessons from today. Vice Chair Rodriguez said liberatory systems are rooted in shared power and interconnectedness, and they create a world where our cultural identities are seen as critical to the ecosystem. Vice Chair Rodriguez said that the Council can incorporate these ideas into its long-term vision, and that doing this will require strong partnerships with communities.

Vice Chair Rodriguez asked what participants will take from this meeting into their lives and work. Council Members and partners shared the following:

- Embodying bold vision and brave action helps others do so as well. As community members, we are not alone. It can be easier to connect than we think and our liberations are dependent on each other.
- Each person should bring seven people from their communities to discuss the statewide vision for health and wellbeing.
- Feeling hopeful, even though it is a challenging time to work in government and public health. There is still work to do and we have people we're bringing with us.
- Feeling inspired and grateful to the elders for sharing their stories.
- During times like this, we must build a repository of memory, support, thought, and love from elders and people in our community.
- Taking away gratitude and reignited purpose.

- When young people don't have dreams, that is a symptom of things having gone terribly wrong. We must have young people with dreams.
- Remain open to what the spirits have to offer in the context of reaching out and being in community. Community has been the thread through everything.
- Today affirmed the values of relationships, interconnectedness, and people speaking from their heart and speaking truth to power.
- Hearing from the elders created a sense of calm and inspiration.
- The Council shows what government can do when it critically listens to the people it serves.

Esmael shared closing remarks for the meeting. Esmael said that when participants come to meetings, they carry all the generations of people who weren't invited or allowed to speak and who didn't have a seat at the table. Esmael spoke about their family's experiences as farm workers and said that these experiences have made them strong. Esmael said that community heals through the collective consciousness we build together. Esmael encouraged the Council to hold steady and stay organized and said that we represent a lot of sectors and communities. Esmael said that we can accomplish change and that people have accomplished a lot with less. Esmael thanked staff for their work.

ADJOURNMENT

Vice Chair Rodriguez adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.

GOVERNOR'S INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HEALTH DISPARITIES

Victor Rodriguez, Vice Chair

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