

Whatcom County Health Department Strategic Plan 2023-2027

October 2022 | Executive Summary

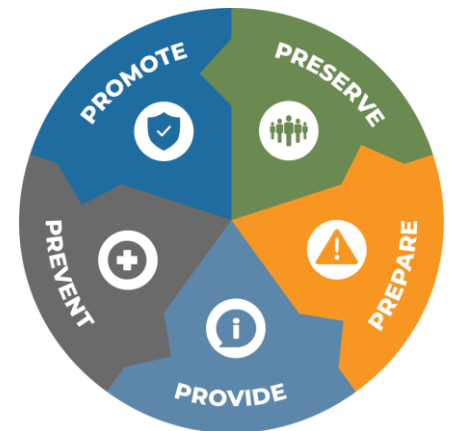
In May 2022, Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) launched a strategic planning process for 2023-2027. WCHD's last strategic plan ended in 2019, and the COVID-19 pandemic consumed the department's time and resources for the next two years. The planning process that began in May 2022 offered the opportunity to reflect on the challenges, growth and lessons learned from the pandemic. Who are we? What is our role in the community? How can we have the greatest positive impact on public health?

Our plan is built upon a foundation of community engagement through other recent or ongoing outreach by the department. In addition, staff at all levels of the department, along with community partners and key leaders participated during the process to offer insights and feedback.

OUR PURPOSE

"We serve Whatcom County by advancing equity and partnering with our community to:

- 🛡️ promote health through policy and systems improvement;
- ⊕ prevent disease and injury;
- 📄 provide accurate and reliable health communication, information and data;
- ⚠️ prepare for and respond to emergencies; and
- 🌿 preserve a healthy environment where everyone can thrive."



The purpose describes the department's unique role in Whatcom County. The programmatic areas mentioned are where the department has and will focus its work in order to make the biggest impact on health and community services.

OUR VALUES

Equity • Collaboration • Compassion • Transparency • Innovation • Service

Our values should be apparent in every interaction with the health department, in all we say and do: with our clients, the communities we serve, our partners, and each other.

OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Through the following four strategic priorities, the Whatcom County Health Department will strengthen our capacity to fulfill our purpose and positively impact community health programs, services and systems.

Community Partnerships & Engagement

Community Partnerships & Engagement

Partner collaboratively to find community-based solutions that advance health and health equity.

Fulfilling our purpose relies heavily on strong community partnerships and engaging our communities. Throughout the pandemic, WCHD has continued building strong partnerships and working collaboratively across sectors. To build on our strength in this area, within the next five years, we will:

Improve communications.

- Further invest in multiple media formats to broaden the reach of health promotion, prevention, and information messages
- Provide timely and transparent information so residents can make informed decisions

- Share information about our programs, funding, and their outcomes to increase knowledge and awareness of health initiatives and activities happening in our county
- Improve internal communication about programs, services and changes so staff can provide our customers, clients, and patients with a broader range of information than their specific role or expertise
- Align our work on different topics to create efficiencies in our response and reduce confusion or duplication for residents

Increase collaboration.

- Formalize our practice of shared decision-making to ensure diverse community perspectives are incorporated into our plans and practices
- Develop, implement, and make meaningful progress on community-led plans and planning efforts.
- Implement the community-led priorities within the Community Health Improvement Plan, and associated work in housing, behavioral health, and early learning and childcare
- Grow and expand as needed, or provide additional resources, to support issues identified by our community partners in areas unique to our purpose

Improve health through policy.

- Increase our involvement in multi-jurisdictional work to ensure regional health issues are addressed in a coordinated and efficient manner
- Proactively seek out information on best practices and new initiatives in other jurisdictions to potentially expand or change programs and services, or propose law or policy changes to improve community health
- Provide coordinated and strategic support for our boards and commissions to provide greater value for both our volunteers and our policymakers

Organizational Infrastructure

Within the next five years, our commitments to our community are to:

Formalize and integrate our equity work.

- Develop and implement a comprehensive equity plan for the department
- Support Whatcom Racial Equity Commission work and implement recommendations
- Participate in county government equity initiatives that improve policies and practices
- Implement training programs on unconscious bias, trauma informed service, and other equity topics to improve interactions with and service to customers, clients, and patients

Update technology systems.

- Replace legacy data systems to improve program reporting, data, and evaluation to provide simplicity for contractors and greater transparency for residents
- Implement training programs for staff on data to enhance their ability to serve customers and answer questions

Improve financial sustainability and oversight.

- Track and apply for grant and funding opportunities that support our community’s health priorities
- Implement new financial systems to reduce manual entry, inefficiencies, and time in reporting financial information
- Proactively monitor funding sources to maximize community benefit and effectively steward public dollars

Advance interdepartmental collaboration.

- Partner with other county departments to improve service delivery and make processes streamlined and consistent
- Collaborate with other county departments on shared issues to improve systems and facilitate collective action

Organizational Infrastructure

Effectively manage finances, resources, and staffing to support a culture of ethical practice, decision-making and governance.

Workforce Development

WCHD relies not only on our own workforce, but our community partners, without whom we could not fulfill our purpose.

Due to the pandemic, the health-related workforce has been under extensive pressure during the last few years. Our commitments to our community are that, within the next five years, we will:

Workforce Development

Build and support a diverse, skilled health and human services workforce while ensuring an organizational culture and work environment that is supportive of staff.

Ensure a qualified and diverse workforce.

- Stabilize the department's workforce through retention efforts that ensure continuity of government, a high standard for customer service, and the ability to respond to an emergency or critical event
- Create opportunities for diverse candidates to contribute their lived experience and perspectives to public health and human services careers

Create a supportive work environment.

- Build and implement a workforce development plan to support staff in their career progression and have the expertise to address and partner on new and emerging health and human services community needs
- Reinforce a positive workplace culture that values strong customer service, continuous learning for program improvement, and clarity and transparency with customers, clients, and patients

Collaborate to address workforce gaps in health-related fields.

- Build a paid internship program that allows local students to gain experience and contribute to the local pipeline for future health and human services workers
- Participate in or convene partners in strategies to plan for and address local workforce gaps in health and human services fields

Quality Management

Quality Management

Use program data to drive decision-making, inform ongoing improvements and foster a culture of transparency and accountability.

We must constantly assess whether our initiatives are successful, so that we can be nimble and shift strategies if needed. Within the next five years, we will:

Measure program and service performance and drive continuous improvement.

- Adopt the Results-Based Accountability framework to improve strategies and tracking of program and service impact, as well as the collective impact on community health
- Execute a new performance management and quality improvement system to create regular opportunities for continuous improvement in programs and services

Evaluate and improve plans, policies and procedures.

- Evaluate programs regularly for benefit and impact
- Evaluate policies and procedures and adjust to improve customer service or to create clarity around regulatory changes

Improve sharing data and information with partners and the community.

- Collaborate with partners on virtual data sharing platforms to ensure alignment around community health goals
- Create an annual report to the community highlighting programs and impacts
- Expand real-time or near real-time public data reporting dashboards

To read more about the Strategic Plan, including recent updates, visit www.whatcomcounty.us/2347/Strategic-Planning.