

From the Secretary's Desk:
Collaborating to Strengthen Rural Care



WSHA & AWPHD Rural Hospital Leadership Conference



June 30, 2026



Washington State
Secretary of Health
Dennis Worsham





MEET & GREET

with Washington State Secretary of Health

Thank you for the opportunity to connect with you.

 Othello
Community
Hospital



Dennis Worsham

www.othellocommunityhospital.org



What does the Department of Health do?

AS A REGULATOR

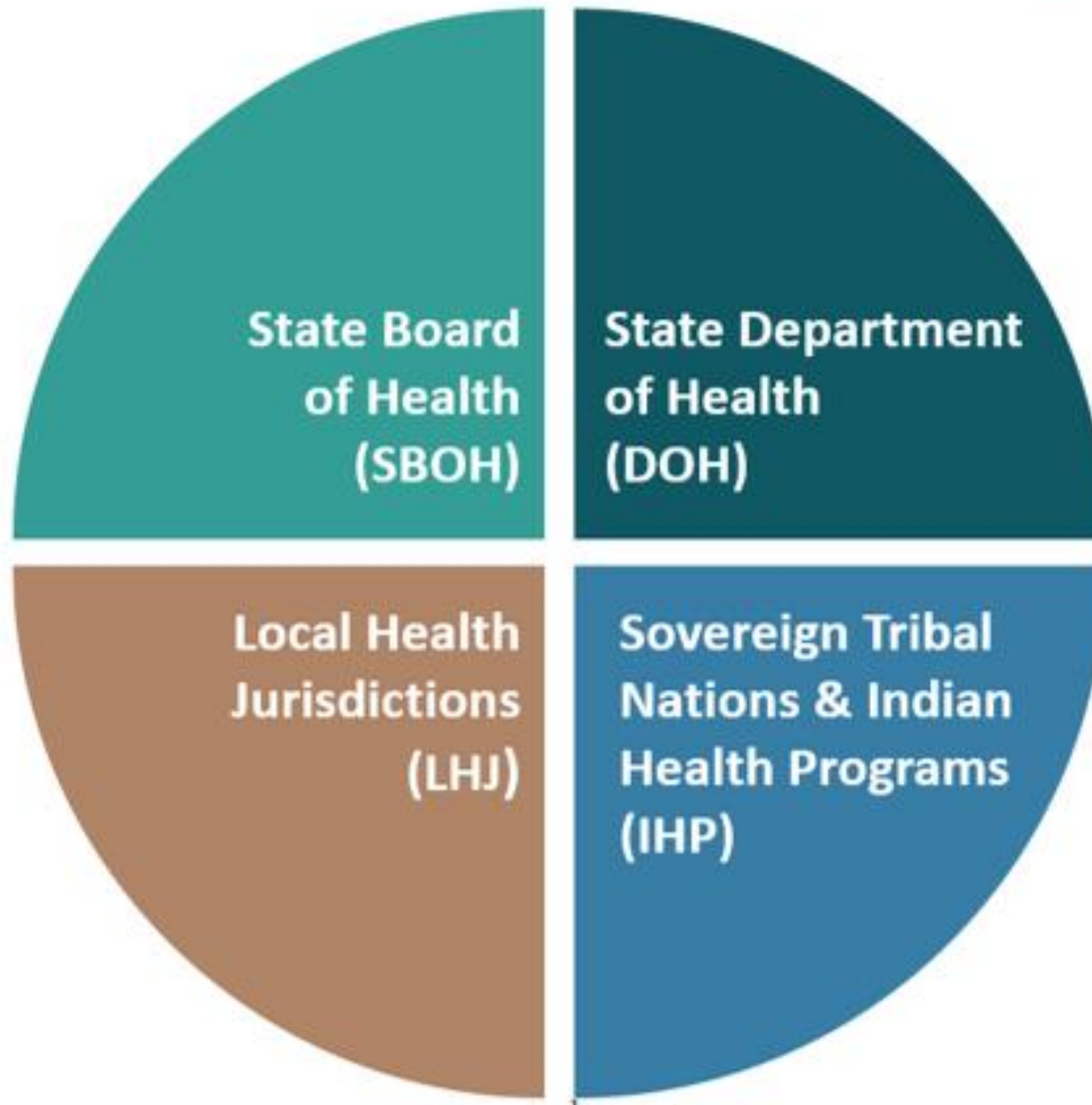
- ◆ **Licenses** health care professionals and facilities.
- ◆ Keeps **drinking water and shellfish** safe.
- ◆ **Tests newborns** for serious health conditions.
- ◆ Operates the **state public health laboratory**.
- ◆ Protects **environmental health** — air, water, and hazardous exposures.
- ◆ Issues **birth and death certificates** and tracks health data.

AS A PARTNER

- ◆ **Protects people from diseases** and responds to outbreaks.
- ◆ Prepares for **emergencies and disasters**.
- ◆ **Supports hospitals** with emergency preparedness, quality improvement, and infection prevention.
- ◆ Promotes **healthy communities** through prevention and wellness programs.
- ◆ Works with a **State Veterinarian** to monitor diseases shared between animals and people.
- ◆ **Partners** with local health departments, Tribal Nations, hospitals, and communities.

DOH is both a **regulator** and a **partner** — working every day to protect the health of all people in WA.

Washington State's Governmental Public Health System



The Washington State Department of Health

Two Houses

The Public Health System

- ◆ Prevention
- ◆ Promotion
- ◆ Protection

The Health Care System

- ◆ Quality
- ◆ Access
- ◆ Affordability

◆ Two systems — interconnected and dependent on one another ◆



First 100-Days

Listening and Learning Tour

First 100-Days

External Listening and Learning Sessions

Who I talked with:

- Local Health Jurisdictions
- Sovereign Tribal Nations
- Urban Area Indian Health Organizations
- Communities and Community-based Organizations
- State Agencies
- Health Care Providers and Hospitals
- Boards and Commissions
- Associations
- Accountable Communities of Health
- K-12 and higher education
- Legislators and other elected officials



What I heard

Systemwide priorities

- Access to Care; Vaccines
- Data Sharing, Access and Integrity
- Workforce
- Health Equity
- Funding Issues



Vaccines are a Core Part of Healthcare and Public Health

- The moment we are in.
- What we hear from providers.



Immunization Roadmap

The Immunization Roadmap is a project to create a four-year **shared strategy** across partner sectors to increase immunization rates in Washington State through:

- Strengthening vaccine confidence through clear communication.
- Expanding access, especially in rural and underserved communities.
- Supporting providers with resources, training, and operational assistance.
- Improving data systems and information sharing.
- Developing strong partnerships.

Strengthening the Workforce Credentialing Process

- Increased call center staffing.
- Added teams to reduce backlogs.
- Expanded applicant training and support.
- Prioritized fixes to improve the HELMS system.



Progress on credentialing

Working to get qualified professionals into practice faster.

88%

of applications resolved by Q1 2026

Up from 43% of monthly applications in May 2025.

30%+

drop in pending applications

Fewer awaiting final approval since the start of 2026.

2,249

applications now pending final approval

Down from 3,320 at the beginning of 2026.



We are listening.





Rural Health Transformation Project



DOH has
specific
activities under
initiatives 2, 5, 6

Initiative 1: Ignite innovation in WA's rural hospitals.

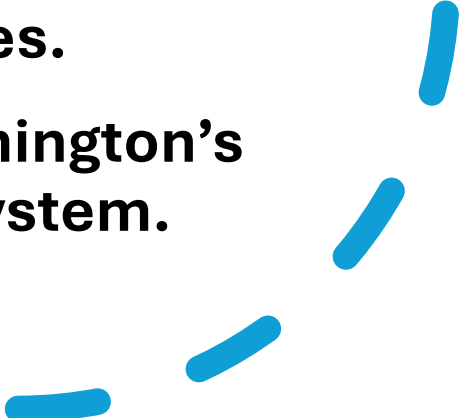
Initiative 2: **Prevent disease and manage care in community settings.**

Initiative 3: Invest in the health of Native Families.

Initiative 4: Adopt technology and data solutions to enable health improvements.

Initiative 5: **Develop WA's rural workforce to support rural communities.**

Initiative 6: **Expand and sustain Washington's rural behavioral health system.**



Potential impacts on Washington health care

H.R. 1 could **reduce access to health coverage and care** for Washington residents — particularly in **rural and underserved communities**.

◆ POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- ◆ **More uninsured residents.** About **half** may delay care because of cost.
- ◆ **Reduced annual state funding.** Phases in up to **\$226 million** in annual lost state savings.
- ◆ **Greater impact on rural communities.** **21%** of Washingtonians live in rural areas.
- ◆ **Reduced access to care.** Fewer maternal, child, and preventive health services.
- ◆ **Growing workforce shortages.** Fewer future health care professionals.

WHY IT MATTERS

Access to affordable health care helps keep Washington communities healthy. Changes that reduce coverage or provider capacity may **increase health disparities** and place additional strain on the state's health care system.

MEDICAID

H.R. 1 challenges

New federal law brings change for the people we serve, providers, and the state.

~14,000

Washingtonians could lose Medicaid coverage

Lawfully present noncitizen eligibility changes take effect in October.

2×

eligibility redeterminations per year

The move to 6-month redeterminations adds burden for both clients and the state.

~\$1.5B

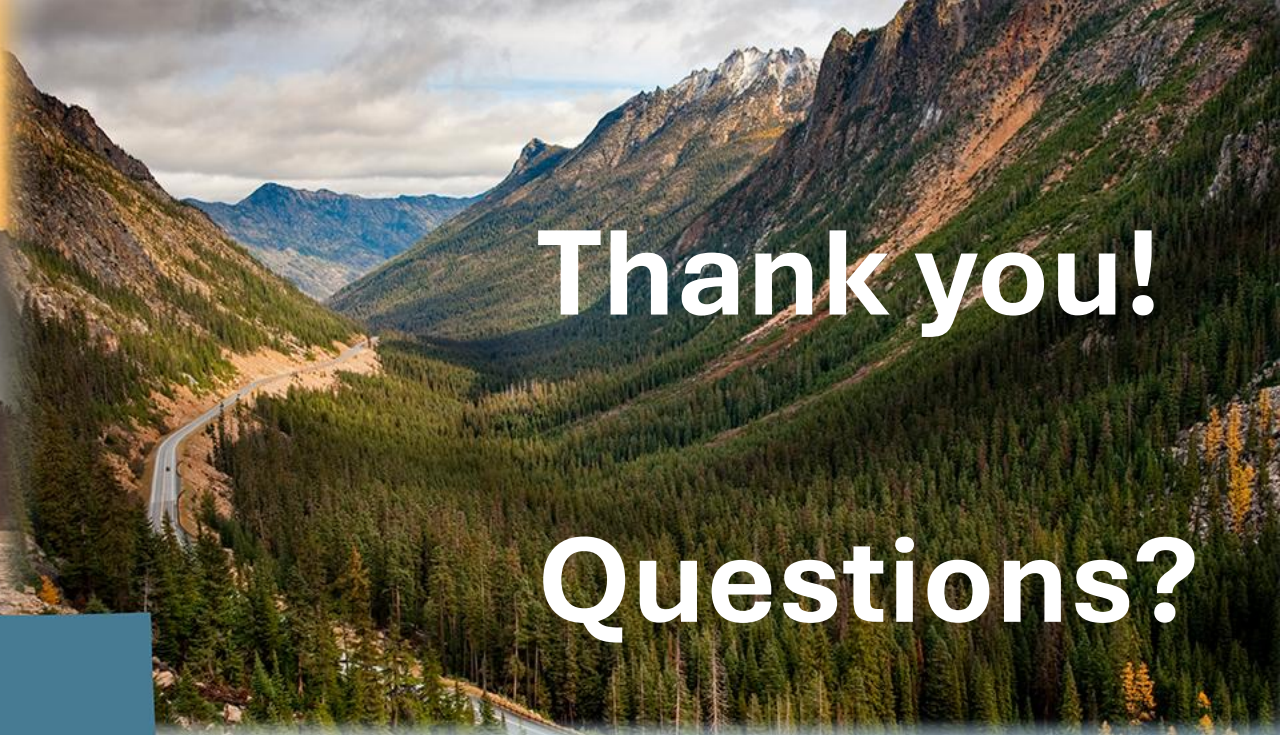
less in annual hospital Medicaid payments

State Directed Payments capped at Medicare levels, ramping down from 2028.



Good News

- Snoqualmie Valley Health HUB
- Jefferson Healthcare Rural Nursing Leadership Summit
- Confluence Health Hospital – Center of Excellence



Thank you!

Questions?

