



healthy
WHATCOM

Community Health Improvement Plan 2022-2026

Published March 2022



WHO WE ARE

Healthy Whatcom is

the group guiding Whatcom County's community health improvement process. We are the 140+ members of our community with experience living, working, or supporting kids in Whatcom County who came together to develop this action plan.

We believe in data-driven results, with a focus on racial equity, to improve health outcomes for children and families.

In all our work, we strive to shift power to communities of color, make systems-level change, and center the voices and experiences of community members who are Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC).

Learn more about Healthy Whatcom and our current work at www.healthywhatcom.org.

The Healthy Whatcom Planning Team

Allison Williams, Whatcom County Health Department

Amy Rydel, Whatcom County Health Department

Christine Espina, Western Washington University

Cindy Cultee, Lummi Indian Business Council

Emily O'Connor, Lydia Place

Jamie Ashton, Opportunity Council/Child Care Aware NW

Jason McGill, Northwest Youth Services

Javier Flores, Opportunity Council

Judy Ziels, Whatcom County Health Department

Lisa Moulds, Whatcom Family & Community Network

Meredith Hayes, United Way Child Care Initiative

Sam Martinez, Whatcom Community Foundation

Samya Lutz, City of Bellingham

Shu-Ling Zhao, Racial Equity Commission Development

Vesla Tonnessen, Whatcom Early Learning Alliance

Philanthropic Partners

Debbie Ahl, Mount Baker Foundation

Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation

Rachel Lucy, PeaceHealth

Whatcom Community Foundation

Whatcom County Health Department

Find a complete list of individuals who participate in Healthy Whatcom in the appendix.





OUR PRIORITIES

Building resilience through investments in **child & youth mental health**

Children who receive the support they need early in life are better able to cope, regulate their emotions, and build stronger and more positive relationships with their peers. Over the course of a lifetime, many factors can affect mental health, including biological factors, life experiences such as trauma or abuse, and family history. The consequences of prolonged, untreated mental illnesses can include educational difficulties, social disengagement, risk of suicide, increased risk of substance misuse and abuse, and potential development of further mental health illnesses.

Creating a strong foundation for children through **early learning & care**

Early childhood development paves the way for success throughout a person's life, and the interactions young children have with their caregivers influence significant brain development during their early years. For parents, access to child care can allow them to work more, attend school, and have lasting positive effects on family economic security and opportunity. Access to affordable, high-quality child care raises the likelihood of improved health outcomes, increased future earnings, and reduced crime rates.

Increasing stability through **housing for families & children**

Housing is critical to overall childhood well-being. People thrive when they have safe, stable places to live. Housing is the biggest expense in most family budgets, making housing affordability a significant factor in financial well-being. Homeownership has long been at the center of the American Dream, offering a way to build family wealth and stable, diverse communities. If we want children to enter kindergarten ready to learn and thrive, we must address safe and stable housing.

We focus on **early childhood**

If children have what they need to thrive in their early years, they are likely to continue to thrive throughout their lifetimes. If we can address housing security; provide quality, affordable child care; and support the mental health needs of caregivers and young children, we can set the kids of today on a trajectory to a healthier tomorrow.

Our work is grounded in **racial equity**

Data from the Community Health Assessment showed evidence of disparities by race and ethnicity across several systems in Whatcom County: education, health care, criminal legal, and child care, among others. We are focused on eliminating the root causes of health inequities: the structural and cultural causes of racial inequities that can be found across all systems.

OUR PROCESS

Community Health Improvement

Community Health Improvement (CHI) is about working together to change conditions so all children and families can thrive. It is a multi-year, collaborative cycle with distinct phases that focuses the community's resources on a small number of key priorities that no one agency can address alone.

During the CHI process, a robust group of stakeholders assess health and well-being, identify a small number of priorities to take action on, convene community members to address the priorities in a community health improvement plan, and ensure accountability and measurement are embedded into the work. For more information and reports, visit healthywhatcom.org.



HOW WE BUILT OUR PLAN

Spring through fall of 2021, Healthy Whatcom hosted two workshop series where over 140 community partners came together to examine data and create this action plan to improve health and well-being for children and families in our community and advance racial justice.

Participants were an intentional mix of people who represent the systems we operate in and are working to change; those with personal, lived experience trying to access housing, behavioral health, and child care services; and those who have experienced racism or marginalization during their time in Whatcom County.

Using the Results-Based Accountability process, the first series examined early childhood well-being and kindergarten readiness data. At the end of the first set of meetings, participants identified eight "groundwater" strategies (see list at right) - proposed by participants who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) - for transformational work in our community. These strategies formed the foundation for our second workshop series, where we focused on developing our plan to improve child and youth mental health, early learning & care, and housing for children and families.

Groundwater* Strategies

Deliver high-quality, culturally relevant, affordable, professional child care, with diverse classrooms, that is accessible where needed.

Put anti-racism into practice by strategically changing the policies, processes, and decision-making of organizations.

Ensure pregnant and parenting families have access to resources and supports on their terms.

Ensure assessments and processes are culturally relevant and removed of implicit bias.

Support and amplify advocacy efforts led by people of color in the community.

Shift power and invest in communities of color to adapt and design curriculum, programs, and services to uplift and include non-dominant cultural characteristics.

Build wealth for BIPOC individuals and families through increased investments and tax equity.

Increase investments in prevention and community-building approaches.

Ensure food access, particularly in areas with high concentrations of BIPOC families.

*To help us stay centered on the structural and cultural causes of racial inequity and not focus on making surface-level changes, we frame our work with The Groundwater Approach from the Racial Equity Institute. The groundwater is a metaphor for structural racism in the US and is founded on three principles: (1) Racial inequity looks the same across all systems, (2) Socioeconomic differences do not explain racial inequity, and (3) Inequities are caused by systems, regardless of culture or behavior.



COMMUNITY-LED ACTIONS

Child & Youth Mental Health

Our desired result

Children, youth, and caregivers of all races and ethnicities in Whatcom County have the support, connections, and healthy relationships they need to belong and thrive.

How we'll get there

Strategies

Increase the number of protective factors* for children, youth, and parents/caregivers, by creating more opportunities for connections within the four domains of prevention (individual/peer, family, school, and community), especially for LGBTQ+ and BIPOC children and youth.

Actions we'll take

Bolded items are actions launched in 2022

Increase opportunities for one-to-one and group peer support for parents/caregivers and those expecting children.

Implement a coordinated entry system to access resources, and expand access to mental health services for pregnant, perinatal, and expecting parents.

Build skills for parents/caregivers by adopting a culturally-responsive, accessible curriculum that includes classes, coaching, and home visits.

Create more professional paid positions within schools, child care, and health care to support mental health initiatives for parents and families.

*Protective factors are characteristics that have been shown to make positive outcomes more likely for young children and their families and to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. Examples include good mental, physical, spiritual and emotional health, positive self-esteem, parental supervision, and strong social support





COMMUNITY-LED ACTIONS

Child & Youth Mental Health

Strategies

Put anti-racism into practice by strategically changing the policies, processes, and decision-making of organizations supporting child, youth, and family mental well-being.

Increase resources and funding for child and youth mental health approaches focusing on prevention, rather than supporting punitive systems.

Actions we'll take

Bolded items are actions launched in 2022

Create and share trauma-informed, LGBTQ+, anti-racist, and cultural humility training for parents/caregivers and professionals who interact with children & youth.

Ensure organizational assessments and processes are culturally relevant and free of implicit bias.

Implement BIPOC-created curricula and programs that elevate non-dominant cultural characteristics.

Increase programming for K-12 students, especially BIPOC and LGBTQ+ children and youth, within public and Lummi Nation schools, to educate children and youth on mental health and self-care in the spirit of trauma-informed, compassion, and hope-informed practices.

Increase the number of peer support groups for youth in 6-12 grade public schools and in the community.

Develop specific roles within school districts to support BIPOC and LGBTQ+ youth.





COMMUNITY-LED ACTIONS

Early Learning & Care (EL&C)

Our desired result

Children of all races and ethnicities in Whatcom County have opportunities for high-quality, culturally relevant, affordable, accessible, and professional child care and early learning experiences.

How we'll get there

Strategies

Ensure early learning and care is culturally responsive* and free of implicit bias.**

Support professional teachers and administrators to obtain the qualifications and training necessary to support children and their families.

Actions we'll take

Bolded items are actions launched in 2022

Deliver kindergarten readiness assessments in a culturally relevant way that validates and includes the child's culture.

Increase the number of early learning and care programs that use the Since Time Immemorial & other BIPOC-created curricula.

Develop and deliver a culturally-responsive family engagement model within EL&C.

Create a community-based hub for EL&C providers for professional development with access to scholarships, mentoring, work release time, and child care while in class and studying.

Ensure EL&C workplace cultures, policies, and practices support retention of BIPOC educators and administrators.

*Culturally responsive teaching is a research-based approach connecting students' cultures, languages, and life experiences with what they learn in school.

**The term implicit bias describes when we have attitudes towards people or associate stereotypes with them without our conscious knowledge.



COMMUNITY-LED ACTIONS

Early Learning & Care (EL&C)

Strategies

Develop and implement an EL&C business model that ensures quality care is sustainable for providers; affordable for families; and educators are well-compensated.

Ensure early learning and care programs meet families' individual needs: location, hours of operation, program model, integration of family support, and culturally responsive resources.

Actions we'll take

Bolded items are actions launched in 2022

Create a map of early learning & care assets to determine the cost to build out a mixed delivery system of early learning providers across Whatcom County.

Conduct workforce compensation pilot programs to identify best practices in workforce sustainability.

Engage EL&C providers to inform and advance the local ballot initiative that aligns with EL&C and groundwater strategies, is flexible to respond to state/federal progress, meets local needs, and is likely to earn Council and voter approval.

Develop coaching programs in alignment with quality improvement efforts to increase cultural relevance, inclusion, sustainability practices, and program assessments to ensure programs are meeting the needs of children and families.





COMMUNITY-LED ACTIONS

Housing for Children & Families

Our desired result

Children and families of all races and ethnicities in Whatcom County have housing justice*, the assurance of stable, high-quality, safe, and affordable housing.

How we'll get there

Strategies

Assure housing justice in every neighborhood and rural community.

Restructure access to housing assistance to focus on prevention, remove implicit bias, and center child well-being and racial equity.

Increase investments in community-building approaches to advance housing equity.

Actions we'll take

Bolded items are actions launched in 2022

Ensure access to housing justice through increasing the supply of available units for rent and purchase.

Build wealth for BIPOC families through increased opportunities for homeownership.

Reform eligibility guidelines for housing services to center child well-being through racial equity and trauma-informed decisions and care.

Elevate and activate principles of anti-racism in participating organizations & increase the representation of client and BIPOC voices within and across agencies for program/process design and review.

Expand programs and services that increase housing stability and prevent homelessness.

Create a communications campaign to reach white, middle, and upper-class neighborhoods to increase awareness and shift community values towards housing justice.

Advocate for changes to local, state, and national housing laws and policies

*Housing Justice is the assurance of stable, high-quality, safe, and affordable housing to residents of all incomes levels.

Early Childhood Well-Being Workshop

May - July 2021



Healthy Whatcom Facilitators: **Amy Rydel**, Whatcom County Health Department | **Cassidy Schroeder**, Lydia Place | **Christine Espina**, Western Washington University | **Cindy Cultee**, Lummi Indian Business Council | **Emily O'Connor**, Lydia Place | **Jamie Ashton**, Opportunity Council/Child Care Aware NW | **Javier Flores**, Opportunity Council | **Judy Ziels**, Whatcom County Health Department | **Meredith Hayes**, United Way Child Care Initiative | **Rachel Lucy**, PeaceHealth | **Sam Martinez**, Whatcom Community Foundation | **Shu-Ling Zhao**, Chuckanut Health Foundation: Racial Equity Commission Development | **Vesla Tonnessen**, Whatcom Early Learning Alliance

Alicia Benish, North Sound ACH
Allison Williams, Whatcom County Health Department
Aly Robinson, Whatcom County Health Department
Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health Department
Ashtin Carnahan, Northwest Youth Services
Astrid Newell, Whatcom County Health Department
Autumn Iputi, referred by Opportunity Council
Barbara Lupo, PeaceHealth
Becky Schayes, Perinatal Mental Health Task Force
Bethany Hogle, Bellingham Public Library
Beverly Porter, The Arc of Whatcom County
Bridget Reeves, Lighthouse Mission Ministries
Chris Cochran, Bellingham Public Schools
Chris Kobdich, Unity Care NW
David Webster, Opportunity Council
Dawn Christiana, Irene Reither Elementary
Dawne Sheppard, Kids Korner Learning Center
Deanna Wildermuth, Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County
Debbie Ahl, Mount Baker Foundation
Debora Haney, Bellingham Public Schools
Diane Miltenberger, Department of Social & Health
Elizabeth Maynard, Bellingham Childcare & Learning Center
Em Bigongiari, Generations Forward
Emily Humphrey-Krigbaum, Bellingham Public Schools
Emily Machin-Mayes, Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center
Erika Lautenbach, Whatcom County Health Department
Escarleth De Leon, Latino community member
Geof Morgan, Birch Bay-Blaine Thrives
하나 Hannah Simonetti, Bellingham Technical College
Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation
Heidi Bugbee, Generations Early Learning & Family Center
James Everett, Meridian School District Superintendent
Janet Malley, WTA
Jason McGill, Northwest Youth Services
Jen Knudsen, Bellingham Technical College & Whatcom Early Learning Alliance
Joe Fuller, Whatcom County Health Department
Johni Gibson, Generations Forward Family Council

Julie Mauermann, Bellingham Public Library
Kate Robertson, Lydia Place
Katherine Freimund, Whatcom Literacy Council
Kathryn DeFilippo, Whatcom County Health Department
Katrice Rodriguez, Nooksack Tribe
Kaye Marshall, Mount Baker School District
Ken Gass, Mt Baker Foundation
Kim Doyle, Whatcom Community College
Kristi Dominguez, Bellingham Public Schools
Kristi Slette, Whatcom Family & Community Network
Kristin Dachelet, Child Care Aware of Northwest WA
Larinda Tiokasin, Brigid Collins
Mara Kelley, PeaceHealth
Marilyn Chu, Western Washington University
Mary McDonnell, Agape Home/The Lighthouse Mission
Mary Sewright, Mt Baker School District
Maureen Hodge, Opportunity Council
Maximum Millett, Bellingham Technical College
Megan Douglas, Brigid Collins
Melinda Yost, Whatcom County YMCA
Melissa Isenhardt, Community member
Michele Waltz, Bellingham Technical College
Michelle Anderson, Mobile Mama Therapy
Monika Mahal, PeaceHealth Pediatrics
Nasreen Mughal-Barrows, Community member
Nita Smith, United Way of Whatcom County
Rachel Lucy, PeaceHealth
Rae Sandstrom, Whatcom Literacy Council
Rebecca Champagne, Ferndale School District
Rebecca Snearly, Whatcom County Health Department
Samya Lutz, City of Bellingham (Housing & Services)
Sandra Andress, Brigid Collins
Sierra James, Whatcom Center for Early Learning
Sterling Chick, Catholic Community Services
Sylvia Mendoza, Nooksack School District
Wilanne Ollila-Perry, Opportunity Council
Yarrow Ling-Hope, Community member
Zanna Ahern, Mount Baker Foundation

Child & Youth Mental Health Workshop

Oct - Dec 2021



Healthy Whatcom Facilitators: Allison Williams, Whatcom County Health Department | Lisa Moulds, Whatcom Family & Community Network | Shu-Ling Zhao, Chuckanut Health Foundation: Racial Equity Commission Development

Andy Basabe, Vamos Outdoors Project

Astrid Newell, Whatcom County Health Department

Bernice Chang, Bellingham Public Library

Danielle Humphreys, Whatcom Family & Community Network

Emily Machin-Mayes, Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center

Erin Smith, Lydia Place

Escarleth De Leon, Courageous Quest Therapy

Geof Morgan, Birch Bay-Blaine Thrives

하나 Hannah Simonetti, Bellingham Technical College

Heather Powell, Boys & Girls Clubs of Whatcom County

Holly Martinsen, Lydia Place

Isabella Phillips, Squalicum High School Wellness Club

Janet Malley, WTA

Jennifer Lovchik, Bellingham Public Library

Jennifer Hooper, Lydia Place

Joe Fuller, Whatcom County Health Department

Jonna Alonso, Western Washington University: Wellness Advocates

Kate Foster, Northsound Youth and Family Coalition & WSU extension

Katherine Freimund, Whatcom Literacy Council

Kathryn DeFilippo, Whatcom Taking Action and Whatcom County Health Department

Kristi Slette, Whatcom Family & Community Network

Kristin Dachelet, Child Care Aware of Northwest WA- Opportunity Council

Lara Welker, Lara Welker Consulting

Lily Baldwin-Garduno, Sea Mar Community Health Centers

Lindsay Anderson, Nooksack Valley School District

Page, Common Goodness Project

Lynnette Odeck, Northwest Educational Service District 189, School Nurse Corps

Megan Douglas, Brigid Collins

Melissa Isenhardt, Community member

Montaine Healy-Green, Lummi Behavioral Health/Project AWARE

Pamela Jons, Whatcom Community Foundation

Rachel Lucy, PeaceHealth

Rebecca Snearly, Whatcom County Health Department

Rocio Castillo-Foell, North Sound ACH

Sandra Andress, WWU Anthropology

Sneha McClincey, Community member and licensed psychologist

Sterling Chick, Catholic Community Services

Trina Hall, Bellingham Public Schools

Urvashi Graham, Whatcom Center for Early Learning/Opportunity Council

Yarrow Ling-Hope, Community member and mental health therapist

Early Learning & Care Workshop

Oct - Dec 2021



Healthy Whatcom Facilitators: **Christine Espina**, Western Washington University | **Jamie Ashton**, Opportunity Council/Child Care Aware NW | **Judy Ziels**, Whatcom County Health Department | **Meredith Hayes**, United Way Child Care Initiative | **Vesla Tonnessen**, Whatcom Early Learning Alliance

Abigail Tankersley, C-RECC NW

Anne Granberg, Whatcom Family YMCA

Bethany Hogle, Bellingham Public Library

Beverly Porter, The Arc of Whatcom County & Whatcom Taking Action

Debbie Ahl, Mount Baker Foundation

Debora Haney, Bellingham Public Schools

Estela Gallegos, Child Care Aware of NW WA/Opportunity Council

Heather Powell, Boys & Girls Clubs of Whatcom County

Heather Flaherty, Chuckanut Health Foundation

James Everett, Meridian School District No. 505

Jamie Desmul, Whatcom Family YMCA

Jen Knudsen, Bellingham Technical College and Whatcom Early Learning Alliance

Johni Gibson, Community member

Julie Mauermann, Bellingham Public Library

Julie Wasilewski, Child Care Aware of NW WA/Opportunity Council

Kaye Marshall, Mount Baker School District

Kenda Sipma, C-RECC NW

Kim Doyle, Whatcom Community College

Kristi Dominguez, Bellingham Public Schools

Marilyn Chu, Western Washington University

Mary Sewright, Mount Baker School District & Whatcom County Superintendents

Melissa Isenhardt, Community member

Michele Waltz, Bellingham Technical College

Nasreen Mughal-Barrows, Community member

Nia Finland, Squalicum High School GRADS program

Pamela Jons, Whatcom Community Foundation

Rachel Lucy, PeaceHealth

Rocio Castillo-Foell, North Sound ACH

Urvashi Graham, Whatcom Center for Early Learning/Opportunity Council

Wilanne Ollila-Perry, Opportunity Council

Housing for Children & Families Workshop

Oct - Dec 2021



Healthy Whatcom Facilitators: **Emily O'Connor**, Lydia Place | **Jason McGill**, Northwest Youth Services | **Samya Lutz**, City of Bellingham

Ann Beck, Whatcom County Health Department

Ashtin Carnahan, Northwest Youth Services

Bridget Reeves, Lighthouse Mission

Brien Thane, Bellingham and Whatcom County Housing Authorities

Carolyn Roy, Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County

Chance Jackson, Lydia Place

Deanna Wildermuth, Interfaith Coalition of Whatcom County

Debbie Paton, Opportunity Council

Emily Humphrey-Krigbaum, Bellingham Public Schools

Emily Highleyman, Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center

Heather McGuinness, North Sound ACH

Jennifer Wright, Child and Family Well-Being Task Force

Jennifer Hooper, Lydia Place

Johni Gibson, Community member

Kate Robertson, Lydia Place

Kate Bartholomew, City of Bellingham

Kate Phillips, Lydia Place

Melissa Isenhardt, Community member

Michael Parker, Opportunity Council

Pamela Jons, Whatcom Community Foundation

Rachel Lucy, PeaceHealth

Sylvia Mendoza, Nooksack School District

Taylor Stagliano, Opportunity Council

Teri Bryant, Opportunity Council

Next Steps

We developed our Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) in 2021. In 2022-2026, we will bring it to life through these strategic actions:

Build community capacity through cultivating & supporting local leaders. Community partners with subject matter expertise and/or personal experience trying to access the behavioral health, child care & early learning, or housing systems will provide critical leadership to ensure action plans move forward while staying true to our Groundwater Strategies.

Build data and reporting systems. Data and results are at the heart of this work. To this end, we will be developing data dashboards for each priority to track and share progress towards our strategies.

Develop communication tools to ensure transparency and accountability. Our process is rooted in accountability to our community. The Healthy Whatcom website will be a hub to access all reports and track progress on our data dashboard.

Collaborate with funding and organizational partners to ensure resources for this work. Human capital and financial resources will be key to moving the CHIP forward. The Healthy Whatcom team will continue to advocate and strategize with partners to identify and remove obstacles to progress.



**May we become
ancestors
future generations
can be
proud
of.**

Contact us

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