



**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](http://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.

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## 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.

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## 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](https://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.**

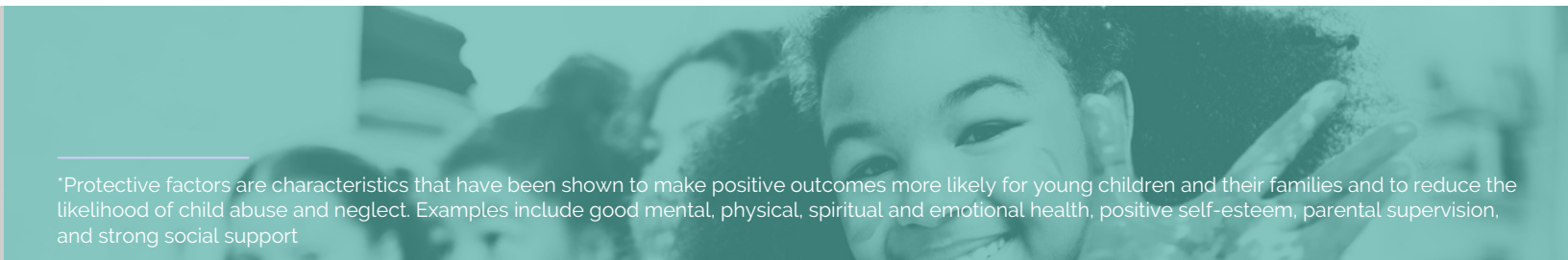
**Implement a coordinated entry system to access resources, and expand access to mental health services for pregnant, perinatal, and expecting parents.**

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.

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\*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 Hoglund**, 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 Ondeck**, 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 Hoglund**, 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 Finsland**, 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**

Amy Rydel, Health Planning Specialist  
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**[healthywhatcom.org](http://healthywhatcom.org)**

