

## Notes

January 2025 meeting

**Organizations Present:** Hope360, Surviving Change, Kitsap Public Health District, Kitsap Regional Library, OESD, Kitsap County, Peninsula Community Health Services, OneHeart Wild, Olympic College, Suquamish Tribe, Kitsap Black Student Union, Kitsap Strong, Living Life Leadership, DocLuvTheKids, KIAC, Kitsap County Accessible Communities Advisory Committee

**Welcome:** Erica welcomed everyone to the first HEC meeting of 2026, reminded everyone of the community compensation guidelines, provided a refresher on how to use the microphones in the Chambers, and checked to make sure online participants could hear the folks in the room. The agenda was shared, the HEC mission and vision were read, and the Collaborative Agreements were shared.

**KPHD update:** Jessica gave a KPHD update and shared her experiences at the Rev. Dr. MLK, Jr. Events this past weekend:

- A CK High school student, David, read a spoken word poem that was particularly powerful.
- There was singing at the event at the Fairgrounds, and the Martin Luther King Community Choir sang [“I Need You to Survive”](#) by Hezekiah Walker, with the lyrics “You are important to me / I need you to survive” which hit particularly hard given what’s going on nationally.
- There was also a wonderful event at BIMA, filled with art, connection, and cultural expression

Jessica provided an update about the KPHD Health Officer position: Dr. Gib Morrow, who used to attend HEC meetings, is no longer the Health Officer, but our interim Health Officer, Dr. Herbie Duber, is joining us today. The Health Officer position is now a .6 FTE, and recruiting for the position has closed. At our next meeting, we should be able to announce who our new Health Officer will be.

Jessica also shared information about KPHD’s upcoming [Children’s Vaccine Clinics](#). Our next clinic, for those aged 18 or younger, is on February 18<sup>th</sup>. Appointments are required.

Jessica shared information about the Washington State [Telebuprenorphine](#) (“Telebupe”) hotline. Patients can access this service by calling our hotline at (206) 289-0287. Calls are answered from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM, 7 days a week.

**Workgroup share-out:** Jessica shared updates from the Mental Health workgroup: the group met with Mark Hughes from KMHS to brainstorm ideas for community education events. The group hopes to have Dr. Best from Olympic College, or the Suicide Awareness Coalition, or the Substance Use Prevention Coalition to come to present to the group in the future.

**Washington State response to federal public health changes:** Dr. Duber shared information about the pediatric vaccine schedule. There have been dramatic changes in the recommendations to the pediatric immunization schedule. Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Meningococcus, Rotavirus, Influenza and RSV vaccines are no longer universally recommended.

- There is no change in insurance coverage by public or private payors at least through 2026
- No change in school vaccine requirements, as these decisions are made at the state level
- No change in the efficacy or safety of vaccines that would suggest changes in the vaccine schedule are necessary
- The West Coast Health Alliance continues to [recommend vaccination in alignment with the American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) recommended child and adolescent immunization schedule](#)
- An important note to be aware of related to peer country comparisons (such as Germany and Denmark) are that these countries have universal health care programs with better access to healthcare, lower healthcare costs, more time off work for new parents, lower costs of childcare, less income inequality, less food and housing insecurity, and greater investments in social programs than the US. Peer nations don't have as many health inequities either, so if we want to decrease vaccines, we should instead focus on decreasing the inequities, making services more accessible, and boosting access to health services for everyone.

Dr. Duber also reiterated that measles levels are high right now. In states with lower MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccination rates, we're seeing outbreaks of measles cases, namely in Texas, South Carolina, and New Mexico. There is no evidence that the MMR vaccine or any vaccine causes autism, but this false belief is contributing to lower vaccination rates in certain parts of the country.

Dr. Duber shared information about local health equity: In Kitsap County, life expectancy at birth in years varies greatly among groups based on race/ethnicity and on geographic region. We see health outcomes mirror median household incomes: those with higher incomes tend to have better health outcomes, and those with lower incomes tend to have worse health outcomes.

Another health equity topic he discussed is health care utilization patterns: patients with social needs are more likely to use emergency department services, and social risks are associated with increased healthcare costs, and homelessness is associated with premature mortality

People who lack stable housing are more likely to be sicker since their basic needs are not being met. They're not "overutilizing" healthcare services – they're not getting the healthcare services they need to stay healthy and meet their basic needs.

Dr. Duber posed the question: What do we need to do in order to move forward in an era of divisiveness? Especially in a time where there are concerning claims coming from the CDC and federal government, not based on scientific evidence, about vaccines, food safety, DEI topics, etc. There is a lack of trust in public health, and the field of public health is also facing funding and personnel cuts. There are also threats against public health – whether it's a shooting outside of the CDC in D.C. or making claims that have no scientific basis.

We want to lead with our strengths: humanity, reliability, transparency, capability.

Steve Kutz shared that vaccinations that are being stopped impact the most vulnerable in our communities, which is only going to make them sicker and make existing inequities worse. In response to the CDC falsely claiming that there is no definitive proof that vaccines do not cause autism, he added that there aren't any studies conclusively showing that driving automobiles doesn't cause autism either.

Martitha May shared a story of bias in healthcare that she was told by a community member.

Akueya Karen Vargas shared that the disparities are what we need to be dealing with (for example, housing, education, food, etc.) in order to get people healthier. The need is in the communities that have been historically marginalized. How do we break down barriers and connect dots, to build trust?

**2026 Legislative Session:** Adrienne shared information about the short legislative session (60 days) and shared overarching themes for 2026:

- Continued state budget challenges
- Preserving access to affordable healthcare and coverage
- Mitigating the impacts of federal policy change to protecting communities across the state

Adrienne shared that KPHD coordinates legislative priorities with the Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials (WSALPHO) and the Washington State Public Health Association (WSPHA).

KPHD's 2026 Legislative priorities are to:

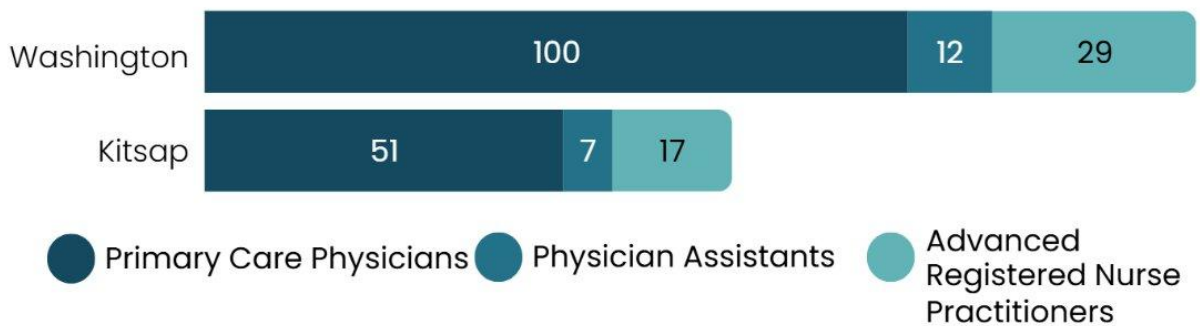
- Preserve public health funding
- Department of Health recommendations for preventative services
- Strengthen access to physical and mental healthcare services
- Learn more about our legislative priorities on our [website](#).

**Healthcare Access in Kitsap County:** Leah shared information from a handout, designed for elected officials, explaining healthcare access needs in Kitsap County.

Healthcare access remains a top concern for residents and community leaders in our area. The Kitsap Public Health Board declared high costs and insufficient access to healthcare services public health crises in 2023. The HEC has also decided to focus on access to healthcare as one of its priority areas.

We are also underserved in the number of providers working in primary care. Kitsap also has fewer providers working in obstetrical and maternal care, mental health, and specialist care.

**Figure 1. 2023 primary care providers per 100,000 residents:<sup>3</sup>**



Leah shared challenges in accessing care as it relates to prenatal, mental health, and primary healthcare. In 2024, 9.7% of Kitsap adults said they needed to see a doctor in the last year but could not afford to.

Healthcare access remains a priority concern for our community due to federal policy [HR.1](#), which could include loss of Medicaid coverage, which will lead to an increase in the uninsured population, which will in turn worsen health due to delayed or skipped care.

In Kitsap County, more than 32,000 adults and 21,000 children were covered by Medicaid (October 2025). Each year, about 750 (27%) of births to Kitsap residents are covered by Medicaid.

Leah shared an infographic from the Washington State Health Care Authority that tracks Apple Health (Medicaid) usage trends in Washington. You can access the graphic [here](#).

Adrienne shared some funding and operational constraints on local healthcare systems, which include healthcare coverage, systemic health needs, and impacts to seeking services, including safety, trust, and comfort. Looking forward, it's important to note that significant changes to federal and state policies are needed to ensure coverage and access to affordable, quality healthcare.

Ending on a high note, Adrienne shared a poem by Amanda Gorman: "The new dawn blooms as we free it. For there is always light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it." We can hope for the future, and keep in mind what we want to see in the future if the political apparatus changes hands.

### **Share-outs:**

Gabby Outlaw-Spencer shared two events that the Black Infant Thrive program at KPHD is hosting: **Community Echoes on January 26<sup>th</sup>** and **Just the Essentials on January 31<sup>st</sup>**.

Kitsap Strong has compiled a [calendar of legislative advocacy days](#). While these events are not hosted by or affiliated with Kitsap Strong, Kitsap Strong shares them to help keep our community informed of opportunities that may offer connection, resources, or support. Jewel Shepherd-Sampson: Empowerment based on change and policy is going to be based on us. Policymakers need to constantly hear from us. We need to go where the money is. Nonprofits have been told not to lobby, but that's been weaponized against smaller organizations. Community café was great, 3 community cafes to talk about politics. "Politics is the air we breathe, the water we drink..." if we want funding, we need to go to where the purse is and where the decisions are being made. Encouraging folks to answer the call, reach beyond the root to fix things collectively.

Kimberlee Williams: Deaf/hard-of-hearing populations are left out of celebrations. These celebrations don't have interpreters to make them accessible. Our Deaf and Hard of Hearing populations also have challenges accessing healthcare. For example, there was a situation where a person who was hard of hearing was sitting in the waiting room for their appointment, and the medical staff called out their name for their appointment. The patient couldn't hear their name being called out, so the staff cancelled the appointment and charged them a no-show fee... but the staff knew the patient couldn't hear! Scheduling appointments with an interpreter is also challenging

Deborah Moore-Jackson: How could we train staff on being accessible? Have a hard conversation with healthcare providers to make sure that people are being respected.

Steve Kutz: How many people can say they have a doctor? A doctor that understands and knows you. If you don't have a doctor, you're in a world of hurt.

Adrienne: “Looking forward” slide: Big Beautiful Bill sets limits on how many funds our state can pull from the federal government. How can our state make up that funding cost? The strain is going to grow.

Jessica uplifted the [Black Infant Thrive report](#).

Steve Kutz: There’s a metric we need to start measuring. When there’s a women’s health issue, a pregnancy issue, and you don’t have a doctor. We could see if there’s a county care doctor (St. Michael’s), see if those trends are going up. St. Michael’s partners with some of those groups, but every single day they have someone on call to see ppl that don’t have an OB/GYN doctor.

Martitha May: Parent-Child Health program, Suquamish Tribe is offering Nurse-Family Partnership – they have different qualifications to access support during their pregnancy and early years.

- **January 23<sup>rd</sup>: Mama Moves Kitsap, Baby Yoga and Baby Massage.** Follow [Mama Moves Kitsap on Instagram](#).
  - o [Pregnancy support line](#)
- **Project Connect happening next week**
  - o Tuesday: Silverdale
  - o Wednesday: Port Orchard
  - o Thursday: Salvation Army

Deborah Moore-Jackson: **12<sup>th</sup> Annual [Washington State African -American Achievement Awards](#), April 25<sup>th</sup> at 5:00**

Akuyea Karen Vargas: [Black History Month Soiree at BIMA](#) commemorating 250th Feb. 21<sup>st</sup>

**Black History Month Celebrations at Evergreen State College – Tacoma** (information in attachments)

Dominica Fale: PCHS opened a small clinic on Bainbridge Island, a Behavioral Health provider is now available there as well

- Building our Own MAs. Struggling with staffing. Creating a curriculum for MAs and connecting with high school students. Alternative pathway for students who don’t want to go to college or shipyard. Hiring and training them on how to be a registered medical assistant. MA apprenticeship program also available.

Steve Kutz: Suquamish taking over Kitsap OB. They came to the Kitsap Board of Health several times to discuss how hard it is for them to stay in business. Willing to take the risk to step in when it’s a difficult time to offer healthcare. City of Poulsbo collaboration with mental health

services. Additional staff there to try to be supportive of folks. Difficult because of federal guidelines, but trying to make it work.

Erica closed the meeting with a reminder of community compensation. Email [equity@kitsappublichealth.org](mailto:equity@kitsappublichealth.org) with any questions or needs.