



**Washington Health Benefit Exchange Board
Meeting Minutes
February 6, 2025
8:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Insurance Building
302 Sid Synder Ave SW Olympia, WA 98501, Conference Room 440
and by Teleconference and Webinar**

Board Members Present:

Monica McLemore, Chair
Dr. Mabel Bodell
Dr. Janice Greene
April E. Lynne
Karen Keiser
Hiroshi Nakano

John Schapman
Leonard Sorrin
Mich'l Needham, on behalf of Acting Director
MaryAnne Lindeblad, *Ex-Officio*
Jane Beyer, on behalf of Commissioner Patty Kuderer,
Ex-Officio

Washington Health Benefit Exchange (WAHBE) Staff Present:

Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer
Jim Crawford, Chief Financial Officer
Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel &
Chief Strategist
Tara Lee, Chief Communications Officer

David Sorrell, Chief Information Officer
Christine Gibert, Director of Policy & Market
Strategy
Shirley Prasad, Director of Government
Affairs

Welcome and Introductions – Monica McLemore, Chair

Dr. Monica McLemore called the meeting to order at 8:45 a.m. She welcomed the attendees and introduced the newest board member, former State Senator Karen Kieser. Chair McLemore announced she is joining the faculty of New York University, and will be continuing in her role as Board Chair until a new chair has been appointed.

**Message for the Day & Legislator Visits – Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer;
Representative Dan Bronoske, Chair of the House Health Care & Wellness Committee;
Representative Joe Schmick, Ranking Member of the House Health Care & Wellness
Committee**

Representative Dan Bronoske provided an overview of his legislative priorities, highlighting priorities related to healthcare.

Representative Joe Schmick discussed the fiscal challenges facing the state and the impact on healthcare. He highlighted financial pressures on hospitals and emphasized the importance of balancing benefit mandates with costs.

Governor Ferguson’s Legislative Priorities – Facilitator: Shirley Prasad, Director of Government Affairs; David Frockt, Deputy Policy Director, Office of Governor Bob Ferguson

David Frockt provided an overview of Governor Ferguson’s legislative priorities which include healthcare policies, youth behavioral health, and social media regulation. Challenges posed by federal policies and budget restraints were also discussed. The Exchange Board emphasized the importance of continued funding for Cascade Care Savings.

Public Comment

Dr. Monica McLemore called for public comment. No public comment was provided.

Cost Containment – Facilitator: Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel & Chief Strategist; Emily Brice, Co-Executive Director of Advocacy, Northwest Health Law Advocates; Nico Janssen, Senior Health Policy Analyst, Office of the Insurance Commissioner; Evan Klein, Special Assistant, Legislative & Policy Affairs, Health Care Authority

Leah Hole-Marshall introduced the topic of cost containment and the ongoing challenges to healthcare affordability and access within Washington state.

Emily Brice described efforts being made to contain healthcare costs in Washington. A survey was conducted providing valuable insight into ongoing consumer health care challenges. Various policy proposals moving within the legislature currently to address high prices, slow corporate influence, improve transparency, and stop unfair medical billing practices were highlighted. The importance of maintaining and maximizing affordability programs like enhanced federal premium tax credits and Cascade Care Savings was addressed.

Evan Klein shared efforts HCA is making to tackle long-term sustainability and affordability in healthcare with two pieces of legislation. One aims to generate greater affordability and redistribute spending and the second seeks to expand access to data in the all-payer claims database, enhancing transparency.

Nico Janssen highlighted two bills the OIC is supporting this session. One aims to rebalance healthcare spending by addressing reimbursement disparities, particularly in behavioral health services, and the other seeks to create a healthcare entity registry for better transparency and consumer information.

State Fiscal Landscape – Facilitator: Jim Crawford, Chief Financial Officer; KD Chapman-See, Director of the Office of Financial Management

KD Chapman-See discussed significant budget challenges Washington State is facing due in part to increased costs and the end of COVID-related funding. Governor Ferguson emphasizes agency-led efficiency and cautious revenue strategies, avoiding reliance on uncertain revenue sources. Because of time constraints, the governor’s office is not producing a full budget but instead asking agencies to propose reductions and then working closely with legislative budget writers and the legislature to produce a sustainable budget while maintaining the most critical services.

Federal Political Landscape – Facilitator: Shirley Prasad, Director of Government Affairs; Peter Ramaley, Senior Outreach Representative with Representative Marilyn Strickland’s District Office

Peter Ramaley shared that Congresswoman Strickland supports extending tax credits and opposes any proposed cuts to Medicaid. He noted challenges caused by recent federal actions, including executive order activity and recent attempts to freeze federal grants. He appreciates the relationship with the Exchange and will continue to share new information when available.

2026 Standard Plans (BOARD ACTION) -- Christine Gibert, Director of Policy & Market Strategy

Christine Gibert outlined two additional standard plans proposed for 2026 that have received stakeholder feedback and public comment: a Bronze plan compatible with an HSA and a low-actuarial value (AV) Gold plan. Stakeholders were supportive of and staff recommended to the Board adding the low-AV Gold as a required standard plan for 2026.

A motion was moved and seconded to approve adding the low-AV Gold as a required Standard plan for 2026. A roll call vote was taken with all members in favor. The motion was APPROVED.

Exchange Budget and Policy Priorities – Shirley Prasad

Shirley Prasad summarized the Exchange’s budget and policy priorities, focusing on key points and accomplishments to discuss with legislators during the afternoon office visits.

Closing Remarks & Adjournment – Ingrid Ulrey; Dr. Monica McLemore

Chair McLemore adjourned the meeting at 12:03 p.m.