

**Washington Health Benefit Exchange Board
Annual Retreat – Day 2
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, July 24, 2025
8:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Suquamish Clearwater Casino Resort, Billy Frank Jr. Hall Conference Room
15347 Suquamish Way NE, Suquamish, WA 98392
and by Teleconference and Webinar**

Board Members Present:

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

Len Sorrin
Dr. Gina Wolf
Jane Beyer on behalf of Commissioner
Patty Kuderer, *Ex-Officio*
Mich'l Needham on behalf of Director
MaryAnne Lindeblad, *Ex-Officio*

Washington Health Benefit Exchange Staff Present:

Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer
Christy Bezanson, Interim Chief Operating Officer
Amairani Castaneda, Board Coordinator
Jim Crawford, Chief Financial Officer
Christine Gibert, Director of Policy and
Market Strategy
Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel &
Chief Strategist

Tara Lee, Chief Communications Officer
Wynne McHale, Chief of Staff
Shirley Prasad, Director of Government Affairs
Manny Santiago, Chief of Equity and
Community Partnerships
Laura Kate Zaichkin, Director of Market
Competition & Affordability

Exchange Guests in Attendance:

Kelly Johnston, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting
Toom Moore, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting
Michele Eberle, Executive Director, Maryland Health Benefit Exchange
Audrey Morse Gasteier, Executive Director, Massachusetts Health Connector
Keven Patchett, Director, Virginia Health Benefit Exchange

Welcome and Roll Call – Monica McLemore, Chair

Dr. Monica McLemore called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m. and requested Christine Gibert to conduct roll call. A quorum of the Board was present.

Centering Exercise – Kelly Johnston, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting; Tom Moore, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting

Tom Moore and Kelly Johnston invited participants to individually reflect on moments when their curiosity aligned with their expertise or experience, then share these insights in small groups. Participants formed trios to discuss their reflections and collaboratively develop "How might we..." statements, framing possibilities for the organization. Staff were encouraged to join, and arrangements were made to include remote members in the activity. After group discussions, each trio reported out their key statements and ideas, which were documented for future reference. The exercise surfaced a variety of themes, including simplifying processes, supporting staff, maintaining customer focus, and exploring new approaches to stakeholder engagement and operational challenges.

State Based Marketplace Directors Panel– Tara Lee, Chief Communications Officer; Michele Eberle, Executive Director, Maryland Health Benefit Exchange; Audrey Morse Gasteier, Executive Director, Massachusetts Health Connector; Keven Patchett, Director, Virginia Health Benefit Exchange

Ingrid Ulrey welcomed the panelists, expressing gratitude for their partnership and collaboration, and highlighted the value of learning from peers during challenging times. She acknowledged the value of NASHP (National Academy for State Health Policy), the network connecting state-based exchanges.

Keven Patchett highlighted Virginia's unique approach to making full Medicaid eligibility determinations for marketplace customers. He expressed concern about the impact of federal uncertainty on uninsured rates and the risk pool, noting that Virginia's uninsured rate had been cut in half over the past decade but could worsen due to upcoming changes. He stated that Virginia had not yet started direct communications with customers about federal changes, preferring to wait until rate information was available. Keven described a multi-pronged security approach focused on minimizing stored data, comprehensive security policies, regular training, and vendor verification. To support staff, Keven emphasized leading by example, maintaining focus on outreach and engagement, and balancing transparency about challenges with reassurance.

Michele Eberle highlighted Maryland's fully integrated IT system and strong legislative support for innovative programs. She expressed concern for the effect of federal actions on Maryland's risk pool and its 1332 waiver and pass-through funding, which could threaten affordability. Michele reported that Maryland had begun communicating with affected customers (e.g., DACA recipients) to prepare them for changes, especially DACA recipients, and positioning the exchange as a trusted resource. She described Maryland's layered approach to data security, including in-house security staff, penetration testing, and monthly mandatory training. Michele described supporting staff through open communication, regular all-staff meetings with guest speakers, and a focus on work-life balance, and noted the importance of peer support among state-based exchange directors.

Audrey Gasteier described Massachusetts' legacy as the first (pre-ACA) state-based marketplace and its state wrap program (Connector Care). She expressed a primary concern regarding the loss

of federal premium tax credits for non-citizen populations and the broader loss of federal dollars, which could affect tens of thousands of residents and destabilize the healthcare system. Audrey said Massachusetts had not yet started customer communications about federal changes, partly because the state wrap program would buffer most enrollees from immediate impacts, but plans were being developed. She expressed a healthy level of concern around data security, highlighting participation in independent security assessments and the addition of dedicated security staff. Audrey emphasized supporting staff by connecting their work to the mission, providing perspective on the cyclical nature of health policy, and investing in employee engagement and departmental support.

The panel ended by Tara thanking panelists for their perspectives and the panelists expressing gratitude for the invitation to participate.

Federal and State Legislative Strategy Development – Shirley Prasad, Government Affairs Director; Jim Crawford, Chief Financial Officer

Shirley Prasad led discussion focused on preparing for significant changes due to federal policy shifts, particularly the potential expiration of ePTC and other impacts from HR1. Shirley outlined the importance of providing data and customer impact information within the August–September window to influence congressional decisions, emphasizing targeted messaging to members of Congress based on district-specific data and leveraging diverse stakeholder groups, including social, civic, religious, and business organizations. The group brainstormed creative outreach tactics and discussed the need for data-driven efforts.

Jim Crawford provided an overview of Washington’s fiscal outlook, highlighting pressures on the general fund and the importance of maintaining funding for Cascade Care Savings. The team reviewed potential legislative priorities for the upcoming session, including continued support for premium assistance, monitoring bills related to healthcare mergers and corporate practice of medicine, and exploring alternative funding sources.

The session concluded with a commitment to further develop action steps and maintain flexibility given the uncertain environment.

Strategic Plan Update Discussion – Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer; Leah Hole Marshall, General Counsel & Chief Strategist

Ingrid Ulrey and Leah Hole-Marshall asked board members to provide direction on how best to update their Strategic Plan to better reflect changing priorities. Board members provided feedback on the different areas of the strategic plan, focusing on its relevance and durability in the current challenging environment. Two board members agreed to assist in updating the language over the next month and an updated draft will be presented for board input and approval at future meetings.

Reflections and Closing - Kelly Johnston, Tom Moore, Ingrid Ulrey, and Monica McLemore

Kelly Johnston invited board members to reflect on their experiences by responding to three questions: what moment captures this moment, what message they would like staff to carry back



to staff, and what they plan to share within their professional and personal communities. Kelly reiterated themes of the board’s commitment to the staff and the mission that have been heard throughout the retreat.

Ingrid Ulrey expressed gratitude for the board’s deepened connection and cohesion, noting their shared understanding of the organizational challenges and emphasis on keeping customers at the center, reducing harm, and looking for opportunities to stabilize the market and Exchange business model.

Chair McLemore emphasized the board’s commitment to supporting the staff and the valuable work of the Exchange, and reaffirmed that the goal remains affordable, high-quality healthcare for all. Monica also stressed the need to draw on both internal and external resources and to remember the purpose behind this work, maintaining hope and focus despite headwinds.

Adjournment – Monica McLemore

Chair McLemore adjourned the meeting at 12:20 p.m.