



**Washington Health Benefit Exchange  
Policy Committee Meeting Minutes  
May 14, 2024 | 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

**Policy Committee Members Present:**

Hiroshi Nakano, Chair  
Mabel Bodell  
Len Sorrin

**Policy Committee Members Absent:**

Don Conant

**Washington Health Benefit Exchange Staff Present:**

Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer	Laura Kate Zaichkin, Senior Policy Advisor
Jim Crawford, Transition Advisor	Kristin Villas, Senior Policy Analyst
Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel & Chief Strategist	Meagan Beckmeyer, Senior UX Researcher
Christine Gibert, Policy Director	Carly Christiansen, Executive Assistant
Spencer Budd, Senior Policy Analyst	Jeramie Del Rosario, Board Coordinator

**Welcome and Introductions**

Policy Committee Chair, Hiroshi Nakano, called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

The December 12, 2023 meeting minutes and the March 19, 2024 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

**CEO Remarks – Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer**

Ingrid Ulrey welcomed Committee members and highlighted the plans for the upcoming May 23<sup>rd</sup> Board Meeting.

**Customer & Market Trends – Affordability and Plan Choice - Kristin Villas, Senior Policy Analyst, Meagan Beckmeyer, Senior UX Researcher**

Kristin Villas began her presentation by noting a high-level market analysis was planned for the upcoming May 23<sup>rd</sup> Board meeting and that today she would focus on a couple of specific areas within that analysis including growth in Public Option plans and growth in enrollment of Gold and Silver plans. Kristin noted she would be sharing quantitative findings and committee members would hear from our customer experience research team.

Kristin highlighted key market trends noting a 150% growth in Public Option enrollment and that now two thirds of customers are now in Silver or Gold plans. Kristin noted the data sources Washington Health Benefit Exchange – Policy Committee Meeting  
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used including the [2024 Spring Open Enrollment Report](#), 2024 Carrier rate and plan filings, and the annual *Healthfinder* customer survey. Kristin noted that survey respondents were more likely to be older, white, female and less likely to be in Public Option plans. Meagan Beckmeyer noted they are looking at how to reach other populations and be more inclusive in the outreach approach.

Kristin reported that record 2024 enrollment was attributed to enhanced subsidies such as the ARPA tax credits with nearly 81% of Exchange customers taking advantage of subsidies. The Exchange's actuarial, Wakely, estimates the Exchange could lose 55,000 customers if ARPA subsidies are allowed to expire. Kristin noted that survey data shows customers believe affordability is key and that providers and prescriptions are important to customers in making their decision.

Kristin highlighted that three quarters of Exchange customers are in a Cascade Care plan with one quarter in Public Option plan. Kristin noted there has been some plan switching, but the largest driver to Cascade Care plans is new customers.

Kristin reported that since 2021, when Public Option plans were first introduced, enrollment has grown from less than 1,000 customers to about 59,000 currently. Kristin also noted that customers who elected Public Option plans were more likely to live in areas where social health barriers were more prevalent.

Kristin noted the Exchange has been watching access as enrollment in Public Option grow and are hearing from carriers that provider contracting is a barrier to growing the Public Option into additional counties. Public Option networks are 20% more narrow than the competition. Kristin added that there are legislatively mandated provider participation requirements for Public Option plans which hospitals circumvent with carving out certain service areas, such as primary and specialty care, which can contribute to confusion and challenges for customers navigating those plans and services.

Kristin reported that survey data shows that customers with Standard Plans report the highest levels of satisfaction while Public Option plans have the lowest satisfaction. Customers also report having the most difficulty confirming their provider is in network, which may result in them realizing after enrollment that their provider is not in network. This highlights the need for cost transparency and more help determining if their provider was covered.

Kristin reviewed customer movement to Silver plans, which typically provide the most amount of cost sharing for customers. Kristin then walked through several customer scenarios to demonstrate that as income (and percent of the Federal Poverty Level) increased, the same health plan can cost a customer a higher percentage of their income. Kristin highlighted the difficulty



customers face when trying to balance costs associated with the different plans – and how hard it is to make apples to apples comparisons and make an informed decision.

### **ARPA Expiration Planning - Christine Gibert, Policy Director, Spencer Budd, Senior Policy Analyst**

Ingrid Ulrey spoke to her recent trip to D.C. at end of April to spread awareness of the impact of the loss of ARPA subsidies. Ingrid noted there was clear partisan divide on the issue, but there is a possibility that there could be a debate on extending subsidies for additional year, or get wrapped into bigger debate on tax cuts. Ingrid highlighted that this topic will likely still be unknown as we set rates for 2025.

Spencer Budd began with an overview of the background on the enhanced federal subsidies and that the subsidies are set to expire December 2025. Spencer noted every income level benefits from the subsidies with no one paying more than 8.5% of their income. Spencer reported that nearly 80% of Washington customers purchasing a qualified health plan (QHP) qualify for a federal subsidy, and on average save over \$400 per member per month on premiums.

Spencer looked at impact of those over and under 400%FPL and walked through an example of an enrollee at 250%FPL before and after the subsidy expires. Spencer noted that those at lower income levels will experience larger increases in net premiums. Spencer also noted those over age 55 will lose the most tax credits on average.

Spencer provided a customer scenario looking at location and noted rural counties, with many customers at or below 250%FPL, will be more impacted and that these counties also contain larger populations of non-white and non-Hispanic residents.

Spencer walked through how the Exchange was preparing for the potential loss of the ARPA subsidies including education, exploring policy options to mitigate impact, and prepping for impact on Exchange business operations. Spencer added that stakeholders groups are forming including community advocates, carriers, and hospital associations.

### **Washington State Affordability Initiatives - Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel-Chief Strategist, Laura Kate Zaichkin, Senior Policy Advisor**

Laura Kate presented, on behalf of Leah Hole-Marshall, on the recent hospital price transparency reports from the Washington (WA) Health Alliance and RAND. Laura Kate highlighted that the WA Health Alliance report finds that WA hospital prices are 288% of what Medicare pays. Laura Kate noted the Exchange will receive private reports from RAND that will show WA Exchange specific data which will help illuminate if Exchange customers are paying too much in hospital associated costs.

Laura Kate walked through landscape of Washington State affordability by reminding Committee Members that in December of 2023 multiple agencies had released reports noting soaring health care costs. Laura Kate reported that the next phase of OIC affordability report is



due in August 2024 and will model several areas including increased Health Care Cost Transparency Board (HCCTB) authority.

Ingrid noted HCCTB is evolving from its initial data gathering mission and into looking forward to how it can influence cost growth, including controlling underlying costs such as provider rate setting and price growth caps, and limiting facility fees.

Laura Kate examined common priorities in exploring controlling high prices and anticompetitive practices.

### **Public Comment**

No public comment was provided.

### **Adjourn**

Hiroshi Nakano adjourned the meeting at 12:02 p.m.