



**Washington Health Benefit Exchange
Policy Committee Meeting Minutes
October 15, 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

Board Members Present:

David Frockt

Washington Health Benefit Exchange Staff Present:

Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer	Carla Reyes, Chief Operations Officer
Jim Crawford, Chief Financial Officer	David Sorrell, Chief Information Officer
Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel & Chief Strategist	Laura Kate Zaichkin, Director of Market Competition & Affordability
Wynne McHale, Chief of Staff	Kristin Villas, Senior Policy Analyst
Manny Santiago, Chief of Equity and Community Partnerships	Christine Gibert, Director of Policy & Market Strategy
Tara Lee, Chief Communications Officer	Amairani Castaneda, Board Coordinator

Welcome and Introductions

Policy Committee Chair, Hiroshi Nakano, called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The August 20, 2024, meeting minutes were approved as presented.

Public Comment

No public comment was provided.

Enhanced Federal Subsidies Impacts and Engagement Update – Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel & Chief Strategist

Leah Hole-Marshall discussed the impact of the potential loss of enhanced federal subsidies created under the pandemic-era American Rescue Plan, expected to expire in 2026. She highlighted a potential \$250 million annual loss of subsidies to the Exchange and its customers in Washington state, which would result in a projected 70,000 customers dropping coverage.



Efforts the Exchange is taking to tackle the loss of federal subsidies include working closely with organizations such as the State Marketplace Network and National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP), engaging in state agency and stakeholder partnerships, educating elected officials on both the state and federal levels, as well as working with the state legislature to secure funding for the Exchange’s state subsidy of \$75 million annually.

Draft Plan Year 2026 Standard Plans – Christine Gibert, Director of Policy & Market Strategy and Kristin Villas, Senior Policy Analyst

Christine Gibert reviewed the Board’s role in approving the 2026 Cascade Care standard plans. She then discussed the historical background of Cascade Care. When first created five years ago, the legislature set guiding principles for Cascade Care which were to lower deductibles, provide more services before the deductible, prioritize co-pays for predictable cost-sharing, maximize tax credits through silver plan design and limit premium increases. She also discussed how standard plans have changed over the years, with the focus currently on providing high-value services without significant increases to premiums or deductibles. A timeline was reviewed for stakeholders and Board engagement around the yearly standard plan design process.

Kristin Villas summarized areas for improvement discussed with the stakeholder workgroup this year, including addressing variations in applicability of facility fees and standardization of new essential health benefits for 2026. Various options were presented for each metal level, including plan designs that include minimal changes and designs that demonstrate tradeoffs necessary to lower cost sharing for high value services (e.g., requiring higher deductible or out-of-pocket maximums). The Committee expressed general agreement with the workgroup’s input and had a question about premium impact, about which Kristin said carriers would be consulted.

Sharpening Cascade Care Tools – Laura Kate Zaichkin, Director of Market Competition & Affordability

Laura Kate Zaichkin walked through policy proposals brought up during the summer Board retreat to sharpen Cascade Care tools. Regarding standard plans, policy options focus on a phased approach and the number of plans at each metal level. Most stakeholders agree with moving to a fully standardized Exchange market over time, but some carriers disagree. Public option proposals focus on addressing access issues and achieving meaningfully lower premiums across the state. Policy options to strengthen the public option were discussed, including provider participation requirements, tightening hospital service reimbursement caps, and adding reimbursement floors for behavioral health that match the primary care floor. Laura Kate noted that Cascade Care Savings funding at current levels will result in a decreased subsidy per person in 2026, considering annual premium increases and the anticipated end of ARPA enhanced subsidies. The Exchange’s top priority is to keep Cascade Care Savings whole and follow through with a successful \$75 million budget request. She ended by discussing next steps,



including developing a legislative strategy in the upcoming months leading up to the Board meeting in December.

Adjourn

Len Sorrin, Acting Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:50 a.m.