

**Washington Health Benefit Exchange Board
Annual Retreat – Day 1
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, July 24, 2024
8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Cedarbrook Lodge, Cedars III Conference Room
18525 36th Ave South, Seattle, WA 98188
and by Teleconference and Webinar**

Board Members Present:

Monica McLemore, Chair
Mabel Bodell
Don Conant
David Frockt
April E. Lynne
John Schapman

Leonard Sorrin
Director Sue Birch, Ex-Officio
Jane Beyer on behalf of Commissioner Mike
Kreidler, Ex-Officio

Board Members Absent:

Hiroshi Nakano

Washington Health Benefit Exchange Staff Present:

Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer
Jim Crawford, Chief Financial Officer
Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel &
Chief Strategist
Manny Santiago, Chief of Equity and
Community Partnerships
Carla Reyes, Chief Operating Officer
Tara Lee, Chief Communications Officer

David Sorrell, Chief Information Officer
Wynne McHale, Chief of Staff
Christine Gibert, Policy Director
Laura Kate Zaichkin, Senior Policy Advisor
Elizabeth Rondón, Language Access Manager
Minh Nguyen, Senior Graphic Designer
Carly Christiansen, Executive Assistant

Exchange Guest Present:

Kelly Johnston, Facilitator, Clarity
Consulting
Tom Moore, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting
Daphne Pie, Regional Health Services
Administrator, Public Health Seattle &
King County

Kristin Meadows, President & CEO LifeWise
Health Plan of WA; VP & GM of Individual and
SEBB Markets, Premera Blue Cross
Brad Becker, Senior Director Pay Strategy, The
Rural Collaborative

Welcome and Roll Call – Monica McLemore, Chair

Dr. Monica McLemore called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. and requested Christine Gibert to conduct roll call. A quorum of the Board was present.

CEO Report – Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer

Ingrid Ulrey began by highlighting the theme of Positioning for the Future for the retreat and the key outcomes including deeper connections between board members, greater understanding of risks and opportunities ahead, and providing strategic high level policy and operational direction to staff.

Ingrid reviewed the strategic priorities for fiscal year (FY) 2023-2025 and introduced the facilitators for the retreat: Kelly Johnston and Tom Moore from Clarity Consulting. Ingrid walked through some of the external landscape changes on the horizon, including a change in federal and state administration, and spoke to some of the planning assumptions staff were using in terms of enrollment, fiscal assumptions and operational transitions.

Ingrid provided an overview of the agenda for the day and highlighted the two development exercises for board members.

Board Development – Exercise 1: Your story and connection to the Exchange Mission and Equity Statement – Kelly Johnston, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting; Tom Moore, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting

Kelly Johnston introduced the initial exercise and asked board members to share their story to help provide context and candor for each other and to allow board members to better understand and hear each other's' perspectives with grace.

Board members shared their stories and their connections to the Exchange's Mission and Equity Statement.

Addressing Affordability Barriers – Leah Hole-Marshall, General Counsel & Chief Strategist; Laura Kate Zaichkin, Director of Market Competition & Affordability; Christine Gibert, Director of Policy & Market Strategy; Panelists: Daphne Pie, Regional Health Services Administrator, Public Health Seattle & King County; Kristin Meadows, President & CEO LifeWise Health Plan of WA; VP & GM of Individual and SEBB Markets, Premera Blue Cross, Brad Becker, Senior Director Pay Strategy, The Rural Collaborative

Leah Hole-Marshall began by providing a recent example of other state-based marketplaces (SBMs) discussing affordability and that while quality and equity are concerns, there is agreement that cost is the major barrier to accessing care. Leah spoke to the Exchange's first responsibility: to provide a platform that makes insurance accessible for people to compare options and to access federal tax subsidies; and that the Exchange Board has also added a commitment to addressing affordability through market stewardship.

Leah highlighted the Washington Exchange's encouragement to other SBMs to begin addressing affordability by digging into data to assess the costs of care in their states, so they were better positioned to be a part of any market reforms. Leah noted this is a long-term issue and that SBMs from many states are working to address affordability.

Laura Kate Zaichkin provided an overview of the Exchange market and began sharing the historically low uninsurance rate of 4.7% in Washington state. Laura Kate stated that the low rate was driven by enhanced federal subsidies introduced during the pandemic and these subsidies are set to expire soon. Laura Kate added that recent initial filings for plan year (PY) 2025 demonstrate a stable Exchange market with statewide coverage offered and public option plans offered in all counties. Laura Kate provided an overview of continued rate increases over the last three years and the widening of premium variation. Laura Kate noted that the main driver of premium increases is the cost of health care and that state subsidies lower premiums for nearly 100,000 customers. Ex-Officio members

Christine Gibert introduced the affordability panelists who were members of the Exchange's Advisory Committee and asked each panelist to provide a brief overview of their perspective on the affordability challenges they face in their organizations and the Exchange's role in that space. Daphnie Pie began by noting the first step towards equity in health care is access to health insurance and the role systemic racism plays in disproportionately affecting affordability in marginalized communities. Daphnie then presented three examples of the barriers customers face in accessing healthcare. Brad Becker provided hospital perspective on the cost of care noting rural facilities were seeing increases in utilization and an increase in the burden of prior authorizations and other administrative related cost drivers from insurance companies. Kristin Meadows provided an insurance carrier's perspective on the rising cost of care and highlighted the challenges in negotiating with various consolidated health systems to provide customers with access to those systems, in a coherent and straightforward fashion, and at a cost that is accessible.

Christine Gibert asked panelists to share how the Exchange can play a role in addressing affordability. Daphnie Pie highlighted some of the issues with the narrow networks within public option plans, and the confusion and accumulated costs associated with moving from Washington Apple Health (WAH) to a qualified health plan (QHP). Daphnie encouraged the Exchange to continue to look at how to address out-of-pocket costs, especially in regards to specialty care. Daphnie also asked the Exchange to look at requesting additional authority from the legislature to be better able to address and affect costs. Brad Becker highlighted the administrative burden of working with large numbers of plans and how market standardization would be helpful in keeping this administrative cost lower. Kristin Meadows spoke to prioritizing policy changes that can help all areas, especially in terms of facility fees and hospital consolidation and what is driving costs in those areas. Kristin noted her company's commitment to standard plans to help cut consumer confusion and help customers make better choices and spoke to partnership with the Exchange to review the data to ensure the value based care options were making the intended impacts.

Board members expressed frustration with the pushback that was received to the Exchange's Standard Plan bill in the previous legislative session and also expressed enthusiasm for looking at out of the box methods, such as spending cards, to help address customers costs.

Public Comment

Chair McLemore called for public comment. No public comment was provided.

Discussion: Exchange Affordability Strategies - Laura Kate Zaichkin, Director of Market Competition & Affordability (*small group breakouts*)

Laura Kate Zaichkin asked board members to break into small groups to discuss the Exchange's specific and direct influence and role in serving as a market steward of affordability as it relates to the Exchange's Cascade Care levers. After discussing in small groups, Laura Kate asked board members to share what they discussed. Board Members provided feedback including better targeting where Cascade Care Savings subsidies are distributed, maximizing and potentially finding new revenue streams, broader plan options in the Exchange's Standard Plan offerings, standardize prior authorizations across Exchange Standard Plans to cut administrative burden, standardize other ways to ensure network adequacy across Standard Plans, look at payment cards for customers to use towards co-pays and is there a way to pay for it that does not increase tax burden. Additional ideas included expanding the Exchange platform to serve more Washingtonians in additional service areas, better data transparency to better focus impact of subsidies, implement ways to push down admin burdens with collaborative billing for smaller providers, using Public Option plans as innovative lab to move towards advanced primary care reimbursements for better outcomes, affiliate with other groups to seek better coverage for drug prices. Board members also noted as many customers utilize Cascade Care Savings funds, carriers should share in the responsibility of being good stewards of public funds by providing better ways of addressing cost of care and being held accountable for doing so.

Ingrid thanked board members for their input and candor and creative ideas to drive equity and advance affordability.

Advancing Equity – Language Access – Tara Lee, Chief Communications Officer; Manny Santiago, Chief of Equity & Community Partnerships; Elizabeth Rondón, Language Access Manager; Minh Nguyen, Senior Graphic Designer

Tara Lee introduced the topic of language access noting that it was the job of the Communications department to ensure that customers were able to receive the information they need in the way they needed to hear it. Tara highlighted that Exchange customers spoke about 80 different languages and that while language access has always been a part of Exchange activities, this year the Exchange made it an important part of those activities by hiring Elizabeth Rondón, the new Language Access Manager.

Manny Santiago, began by saying, in Spanish, that he would be providing some statistics and projections to contextualize today's presentation. Manny noted, in English, that his speaking Spanish may have thrown listeners off for a moment, which was part of what the presentation by Elizabeth and Ming Nguyen would be about. Manny stated that the rate of uninsured in Washington was at about 4.7%, however the rate of uninsured amongst undocumented residents is around 49%. Manny highlighted the uninsured rates for American Indian and Alaskan Natives is 16.7%, for Latino and Latina and other Hispanic individuals the rate is 15.8%, for Black and African American communities the rate is 8.3%, for Asian, Pacific Islander, and Nativ Hawaiian communities the rate is 5.2% and for white residents the rate is 5.1%. Manny added that these rates highlight the equity differences, and that language access was an important part of meeting customers needs.

Elizabeth and Minh presented an example of an English-only speaking person trying to make an appointment for their son to receive his immunizations in a country where Vietnam was the primary language spoken. The presentation walked through each step of the process and included the different ways the person seeking care tried and was often unsuccessful in navigating the different access points. The presentation was illustrative of some of the challenges customers may face in accessing health care in Washington. Elizabeth spoke to having helped her family navigate health care as non-English speaking residents and how that drove her commitment to working in language access at the Exchange.

Customer Service for the Future – Carla Reyes, Chief Operating Officer; Manny Santiago, Chief of Equity & Community Partnerships

Carla Reyes presented on the ways the Exchange was trying to operationally implement a customer service experience that can serve all Washingtonians. Carla displayed the current version of the customer service continuum starting with self-service models such as *Washington Healthplanfinder* and moving to specific customer assistance such as the customer support center and appeals. Carla noted that as customer cases become more complex, they often need to engage with more assistance. Carla added that part of building a through line of customer service is using the Human-Centered Design approach, which views service from the customer's point of view, staying empathetic, defining the process, and iterating solutions. Carla reviewed some of the benefits of Human-Centered Design including improved customer satisfaction, enhances usability and accessibility, and nurturing an innovative culture.

Manny Santiago introduced a video from Veterans Affairs (VA) that highlighted the importance of Human-Centered Design. Manny asked what core principles should guide the Exchange's customer experience. Board members shared that keeping the process as simple as possible and asking our customers what simple means to them; as well as potentially, in the future, connecting them to additional services that can contribute to their overall health.

Customer Secure for the Future – David Sorrell, Chief Information Officer; Ruchi Shewaramani, Chief Information Security Officer

David Sorrell provided an overview of the cyber security landscape and some of the security initiatives the Exchange is engaged with. David began by noting the Exchange was not impacted directly by the recent global IT outage which was caused by a defective update released by CrowdStrike. David noted that this recent event highlighted the need for appropriate incident response, as well as a robust software release process. David noted that these types of events can happen and that incident response plans provide pathways through. David walked through several cybersecurity landscape facts including that malware attacks rose by 71% between 2016 and 2021, with over 2,365 cyberattacks in 2023. David noted that the healthcare industry experiences a higher level of cybersecurity attacks than most other industries. David presented some of the common ways that bad-actors can attach a system noting that nearly 80% of all attacks began with phishing. David noted that there was an estimated of nearly a billion types of malware that currently exist and that in 2023 malware was involved in nearly 20% of attacks.

David walked through some of the recent trends in cybersecurity noting that Artificial Intelligence (AI) was being in more and more attacks and that cybercrime as service was also

increasing. Ruchi noted that cyber attackers often have more tools and resources available, making it difficult to stay on top of the ever-evolving innovation in the cyber attack world. David presented several security related initiatives the Exchange was engaged in, including having a mature IT security program that worked to continually assess, adjust and invest in a myriad of ways to protect the system and Exchange customers.

Board members expressed the desire to have a more robust discussion on cyber security in an upcoming Board meeting.

Board Development – Exercise 2: How do we serve, looking back and forward – Kelly Johnston, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting; Tom Moore, Facilitator, Clarity Consulting

Kelly Johnston introduced the next board development exercise which would focus on the ‘how might we’s’ which would help inform and calibrate staff in the upcoming days activities. Tom Moore broke board members into groups to discuss leadership attributes that would help advance Exchange priorities.

Closing Remarks - Ingrid Ulrey, Chief Executive Officer

Ingrid Ulrey thanked the work of Tom and Kelly in facilitating the board development work and thanked board members for their willing participation. Ingrid recognized the overarching commitment to addressing affordability amongst board members and added that she also heard throughout the day of the importance of working with stakeholders and partners.

Adjournment – Monica McLemore, Chair

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.