



MEETING OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

March 12, 2026
7:00 AM to 8:30 AM

Hybrid Meeting

In person: Administrative Conference Room, 509 Girard Street, Bellingham, WA 98225

Public Zoom Link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86122878257?pwd=KhZiVSSPJZzrgqjdUd0G1oLRE074DA.cYW-YU20JHCjqz4z>

Join by phone: 1 253 215 8782, Webinar ID: 861 2287 8257, Passcode: 554349

(members and presenters: please use Zoom link in your meeting invitation)

AGENDA

Meeting Topics			Presenter
1.	Welcome Roll Call Land Acknowledgement Approve 2/12 Meeting Minutes (Pages 3 – 28)	7:00 – 7:10	Rachel McGarrity Nicole Ervin PHAB Member Rachel McGarrity
2.	Public Comment	7:10 – 7:20	Rachel McGarrity
3.	WCHCS Health Officer Report	7:20 – 7:35	Meg Lelonek
4.	WCHCS Director Report	7:35 – 7:40	Champ Thomaskutty
5.	Subcommittee Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcommittee list review Connection to Vital Conditions Framework New member orientation re-cap Subcommittee roles, responsibilities, and communication April meeting prep – what the subcommittees will do before the 4/9 PHAB meeting 	7:40 – 8:20	Joni Hensley Rachel McGarrity
9.	Call for Agenda Items	8:20 – 8:30	Rachel McGarrity
<p>The public is invited to email written comments on agenda items or other topics of interest to the Public Health Advisory Board at PHAB@co.whatcom.wa.us. Please put “PHAB Public Comment” in the subject line. Written comments received at least 48 hours before the meeting will be distributed to board members prior to the meeting. Oral comments from the public will be limited to topics on the agenda.</p> <p>Per RCW 42.17A.555 the use of public facilities to support or oppose candidates or ballot issues is prohibited. Members of the public and the legislative body are not allowed to speak in support of, or in opposition to, a ballot measure or individual candidacy during an open public meeting. Please refrain from raising campaign issues when addressing the Board.</p>			
Adjourn			



Next Joint Meeting of the Health Board and the Public Health Advisory Board: March 31, 2026

Next Regular Meeting of the Public Health Advisory Board: April 9, 2026

Community members who require special assistance to participate in a committee meeting are asked to contact the meeting facilitator at least 4 business days in advance.



WHATCOM COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD MEETING MINUTES

FEBRUARY 12, 2026

Present: Alan Lifson, Joni Hensley, Shu-Ling Zhao, Nathaline Nivens, Sterling Chick, Deb Shawver, Alison Fontaine, Robyn Phillips-Madson, Rachel McGarrity (Interim Chair), Markis Dee Stidham, Ben Twigg, Amelia Vader, Ashley Thomasson, Guy Occhiogrosso, Chris Kobdish, Kendra Cristelli, Jon Scanlon, Amy Harley, Meg Lelonek

Absent: Carl Isom-McDaniel, Mike Cohen, Christine Espina

Topic	Discussion/Outcome
Call to Order	Roll call of Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) members was taken. Jon Scanlon presented a land acknowledgement.
Approve Minutes	Sterling Chick moved to approve the January 8 meeting minutes. Markis Dee Stidham seconded the motion. Motion passed by unanimous consent.
Public Comment	Rachel McGarrity invited public comment. The following people spoke: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Natalie Chavez
Health Officer Report	Dr. Meg Lelonek shared a presentation on falls (slides appended to these minutes), which are the leading cause of injury-related emergency calls for older adults in both Whatcom County and Washington State. Joni Hensley mentioned that, due to recent Medicaid changes, some procedures like nerve stimulation, spinal stenosis treatments and arthroscopies are being denied, which significantly affects this population. Rachel inquired about an upcoming community conversation and Dr. Lelonek confirmed it will occur February 20 at 9:00 AM at PeaceHealth St. Luke's Community Education Center.
Health Director Report	<p>Health and Community Services (HCS) Director Champ Thomaskutty shared an update on Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS) funding. Governor Ferguson has recommended a \$50 million cut to FPHS, or about 1/3 of FPHS dollars, which would have a significant impact on local health jurisdictions in Washington State. For reference, he noted that Whatcom County is receiving about \$3.6 million in FPHS dollars this fiscal year, which was down about \$400,000 from the previous fiscal year. Director Thomaskutty noted that there are currently several bills in committee, including Senate Bill 6129, aimed at taxing vape and nicotine products to help fund FPHS. He said he is not anticipating the full cut proposed by the governor, but he does expect cuts. He also reminded PHAB that HCS was asked to cut \$1 million from the county's general fund budget at the beginning of this fiscal year, which was accomplished by cutting approximately 12 vacant positions. He noted the reason the FPHS cuts would be so impactful is because those dollars are some of the most flexible HCS has to work with. The bulk of the department's funding is tied to specific tasks or services and cannot be used for anything else. Director Thomaskutty also shared a handout (appended to these minutes) that the department created to help advocate for FPHS funding during the Legislative Session.</p> <p>Councilmember Scanlon shared that the County Council, acting as the Health Board, is working on a resolution regarding FPHS funding, which he's hoping will pass at the February 24 Council meeting. He said other counties are passing similar resolutions, which will all go into the legislative record in Olympia. Councilmember Scanlon</p>

	<p>also noted that he anticipates further cuts to the county's general fund given revenue shortfalls, particularly in sales tax, when they begin discussing the next biennial budget this summer/fall. He said PHAB could be helpful in setting priorities and making recommendations to Council regarding the budget.</p>
<p>Welcome New Members and Review Orientation Plans</p>	<p>Members took turns introducing themselves, sharing a little bit about their professional backgrounds and what they bring to PHAB.</p> <p>Rachel proposed some dates for a potential new member orientation. The following dates appeared to work best for new members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friday, Feb. 20 • Friday, Feb. 27 <p>Rachel indicated she'd have Nicole Ervin email out the details. Councilmember Scanlon asked if Rachel will be leading a training on the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) or if new members should take the Attorney General's online training. Rachel said new members should definitely take the online training, but she will also go over OPMA during the orientation. Councilmember Scanlon indicated he's happy to be a resource on this topic as well and can reach out to the county's lawyers for additional guidance when needed.</p>
<p>2026 Workplan Review and Subgroup Formation</p>	<p>Rachel went over the final draft of the 2026 PHAB workplan (appended to these minutes) and invited all members to sign up for a subcommittee as outlined in the plan. Subcommittee assignments were as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Continuation of Infrastructure Changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joni Hensley • Jon Scanlon • Sterling Chick • Allison Fontaine • Shu-Ling Zhao 2) Orientation of New Members <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rachel McGarrity • Allison Fontaine • Charlene Ramont 3) Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joni Hensley • Robyn Phillips-Madson • Amelia Vader • Rachel McGarrity • Nathaline Nivens 4) Budget Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ben Twigg • Nathaline Nivens • Allison Fontaine 5) Training and Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deb Shawver • Markis Dee Stidham

	<p>6) CHA/CHIP/MAPP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sterling Chick • Shu-Ling Zhao • Christine Espina • Alan Lifson <p>7) 2026 Retreat Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rachel McGarrity • Joni Hensley <p>8) Homelessness and Housing (added per the request of Markis Dee Stidham)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markis Dee Stidham • Joni Hensley • Ashley Thomasson • Kendra Cristelli
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<p>Flood Recovery Status Update</p>	<p>Councilmember Scanlon shared that nearly every department within the county, as well as local businesses, non-profits, faith communities, police departments, fire departments, neighbors, etc. have stepped up to help with flood recovery. He noted that many folks have not been able to return to their homes since the December flooding, some still staying in hotels or fifth wheels in their driveways while they continue to rebuild. He also noted that we are still in flood season. He shared the following updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The County Council passed a resolution (appended to these minutes) to utilize the Healthy Children’s Fund to support families that were affected by the flooding and have children ages birth to 5. So far, two organizations are partnering with the county to distribute these funds and applications are still being accepted at https://content.govdelivery.com/bulletins/gd/WAWHATCOMCO-40581e4?wgt_ref=WAWHATCOMCO_WIDGET_29. • The County Council also passed a resolution (appended to these minutes) to elevate 2021 FEMA funding that was never dispersed. Consequently, some folks who could have elevated their homes with that funding have now been impacted by the 2025 flooding as well. These funds are currently awaiting approval from the Secretary of Homeland Security, Kristi Noem. • The county has entered a request (appended to these minutes) to the state legislature for \$15 million for immediate flood mitigation work (memo appended to these minutes.) Councilmember Scanlon noted that we are looking at about \$180 million worth of work over the next 5 years. This work would include many projects, including widening the channel of the Nooksack River near the bridge in Everson and potentially building ring dikes around Nooksack, Everson and Sumas. Councilmember Scanlon acknowledged that we’ll need to get state and federal funding in order to do these projects. • Councilmember Scanlon also shared the following resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ https://www.whatcomcounty.us/4036/Whatcom-Ready ○ https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/4651f109cdc846a39005012d61718d98 ○ https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5e506994d3b7407c9330befde25a3305 ○ https://www.whatcomcounty.us/4681/Future-Shorelines-Project ○ https://www.whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/102150/FINAL_Whatcom-FutureShorelines-Report
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Wrap Up	<p>Markis Dee made a motion for PHAB to advise the Board of Health and the Health Department to do an emergent review of the Severe Weather Shelter and its funding to see if it can stay open longer and provide stability for the folks who need it.</p> <p>The Zoom connection was lost and no vote could be taken.</p>
Adjourn	<p>The meeting adjourned abruptly at 8:32 AM.</p>
Next Meeting	<p>The next regular PHAB meeting is scheduled for March 12, 2026 at 7:00 AM.</p>

Falls in Whatcom County

Meghan Lelonek, MD

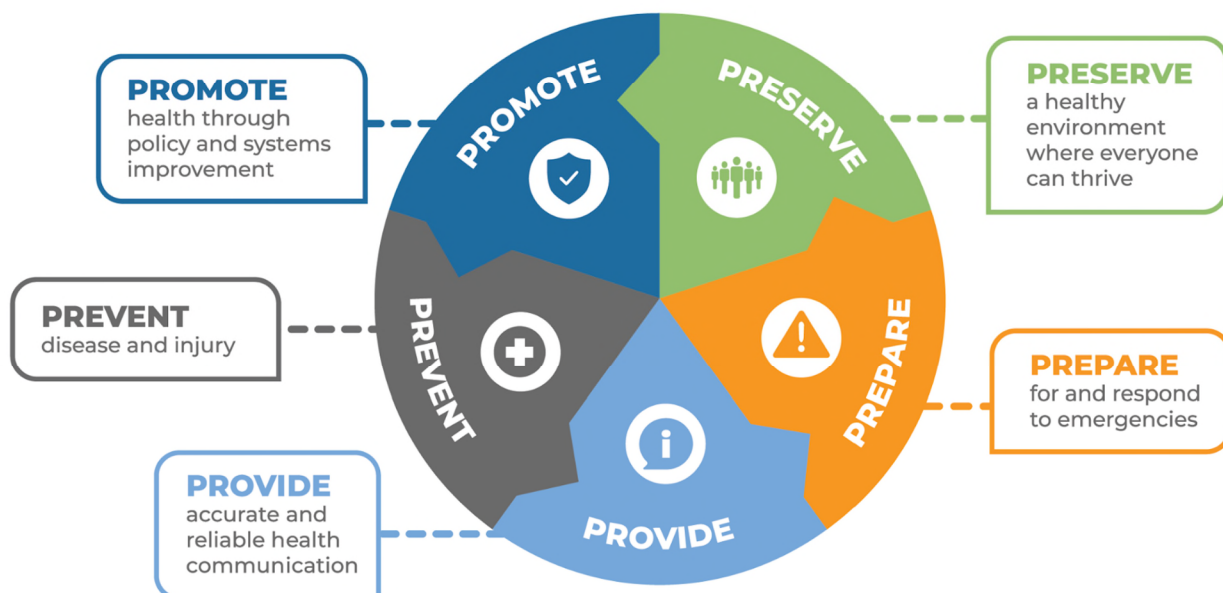
February 12, 2026
Public Health Advisory Board



WHATCOM COUNTY
**HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**




OUR PURPOSE: We serve Whatcom County by
ADVANCING EQUITY & **PARTNERING WITH OUR COMMUNITY** to:







- **Falls are the leading cause of injury-related emergency calls for older adults in both Whatcom County and Washington State.**
- In 2024 alone, Whatcom County EMS responded to **551 fall-related calls**, making falls the most common reason for 911 dispatches.
- Nationally, falls lead to more than 36 million incidents annually, contributing to fractures, head trauma, hospitalization, and even premature death.




MOST DEADLY INJURY FOR 65+
Falls cause most senior injuries and deaths.




1 IN 4 OLDER ADULTS FALL EACH YEAR
Falls are very common among seniors, affecting a significant portion of this population annually.




3 MILLION ER VISITS. 1 MILLION HOSPITALIZATIONS.
Falls heavily impact emergency services and hospitals.



ONE FALL DOUBLES REPEAT RISK
An initial fall greatly raises risk of another.



A SENIOR TREATED EVERY 11 SECONDS
Falls result in frequent emergency treatments.



VISION LOSS DOUBLES AND HEARING LOSS TRIPLES FALL RISK
Sensory impairments significantly increase fall risk but can be mitigated.

County Demographics by age

Whatcom County, age 60+

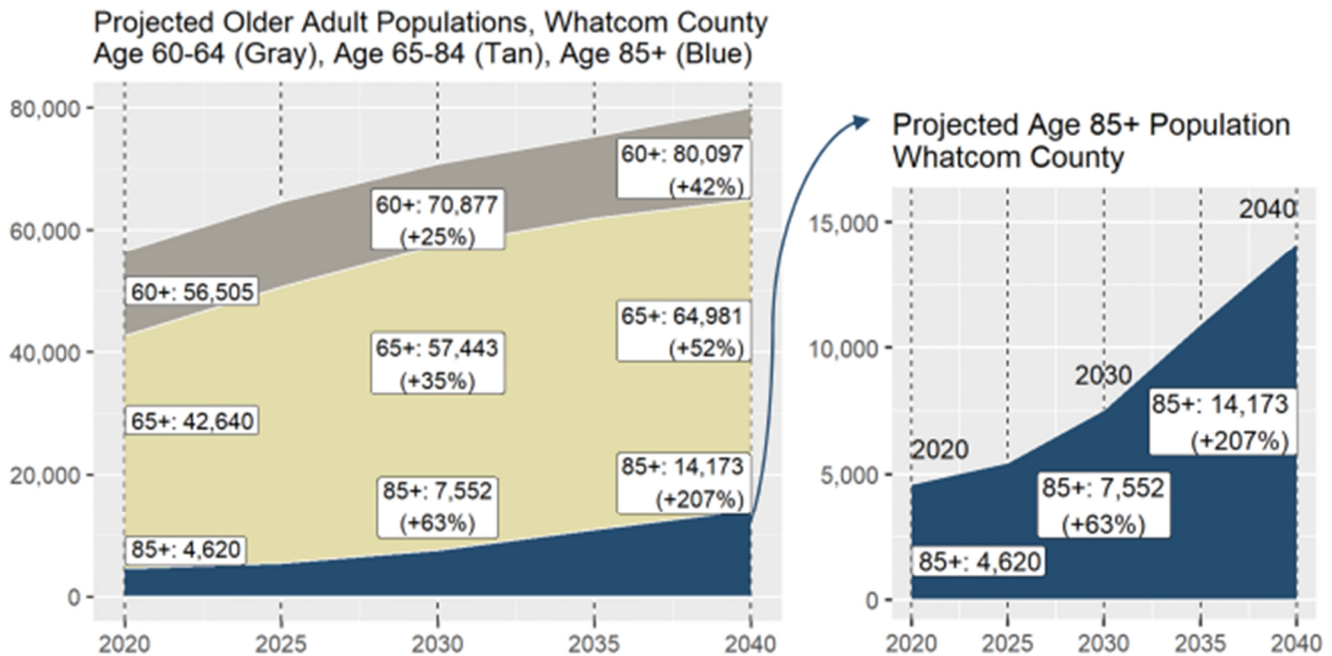
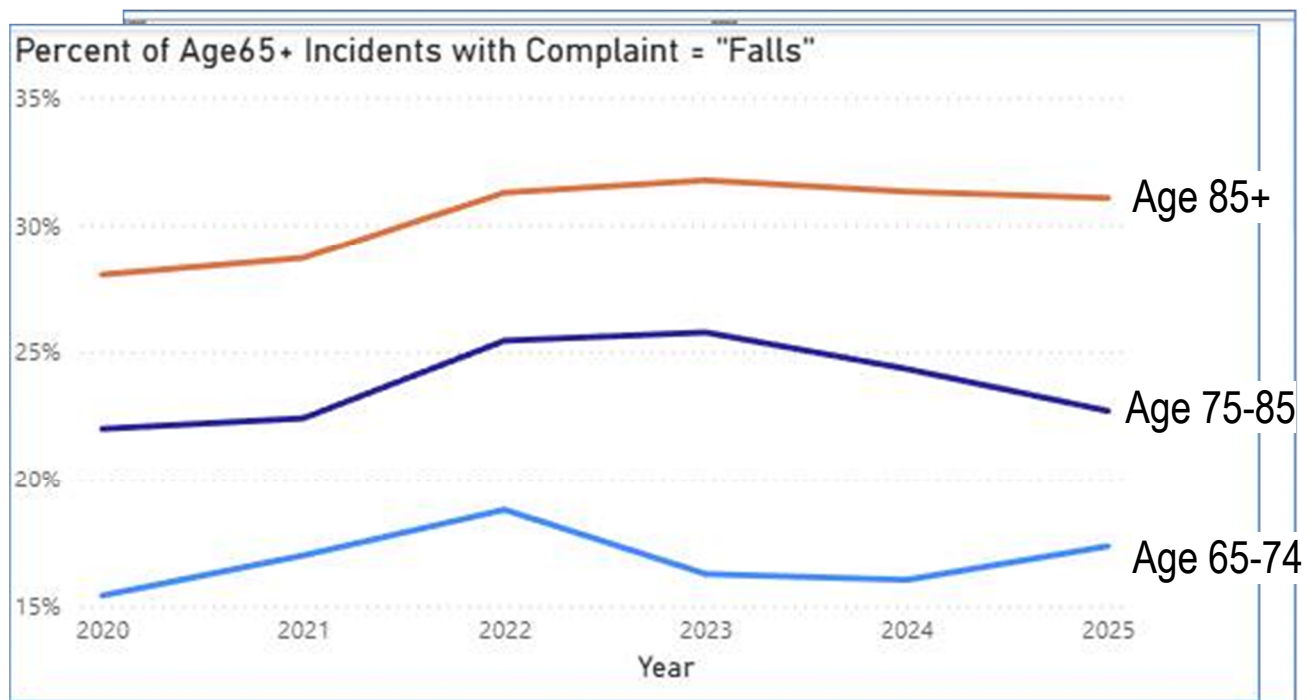


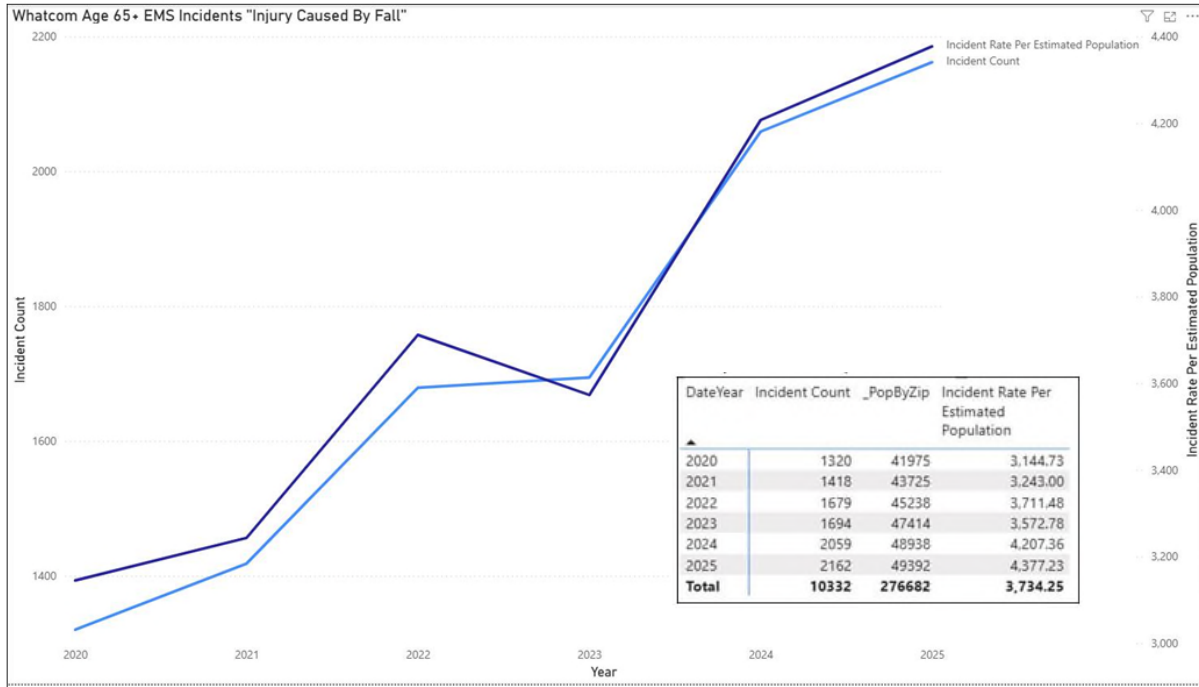
Figure: Age group population sizes, projected through 2040, with percent change from 2020 in parentheses.ⁱ

EMS Dispatch Calls for Falls

Whatcom County, age 65+

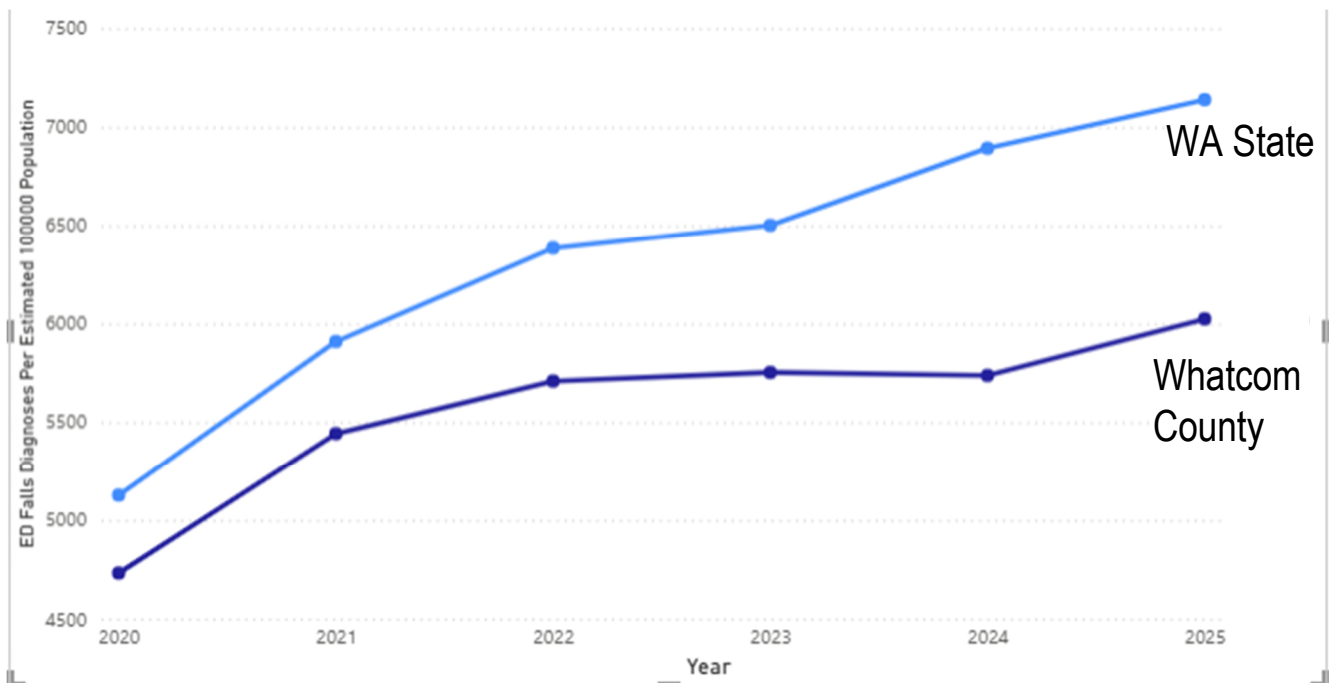


Injuries Caused by Falls



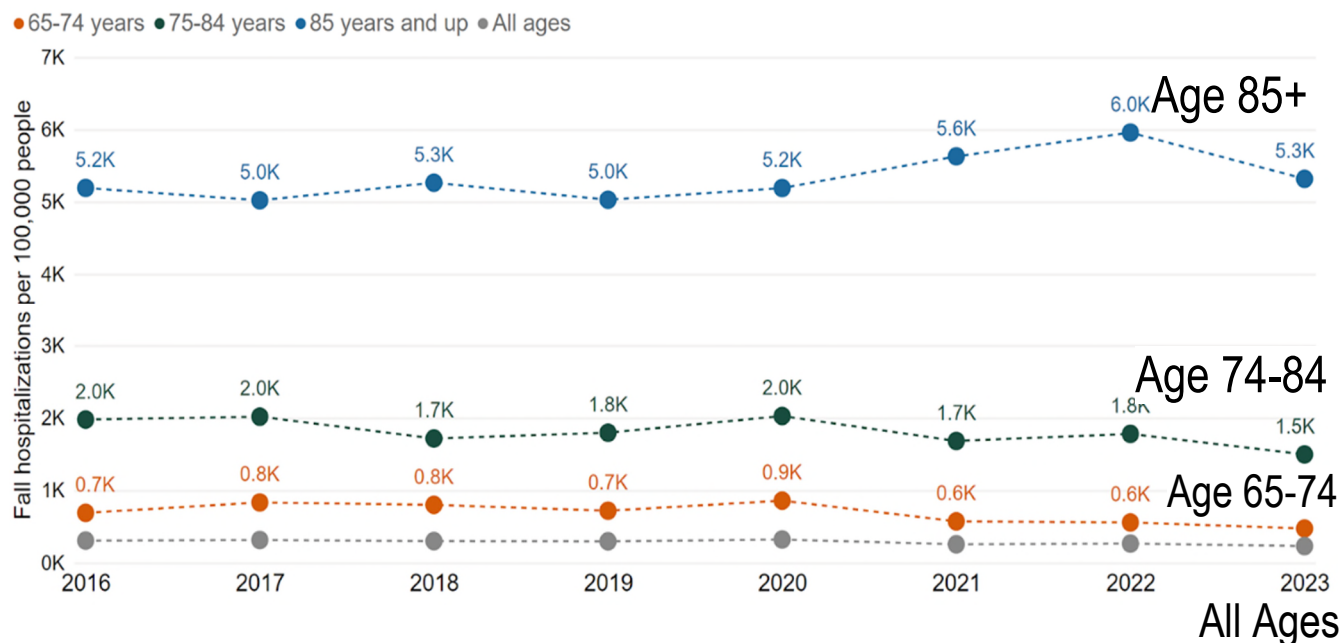
ED Visits for Falls

Whatcom County & WA State, age 65+

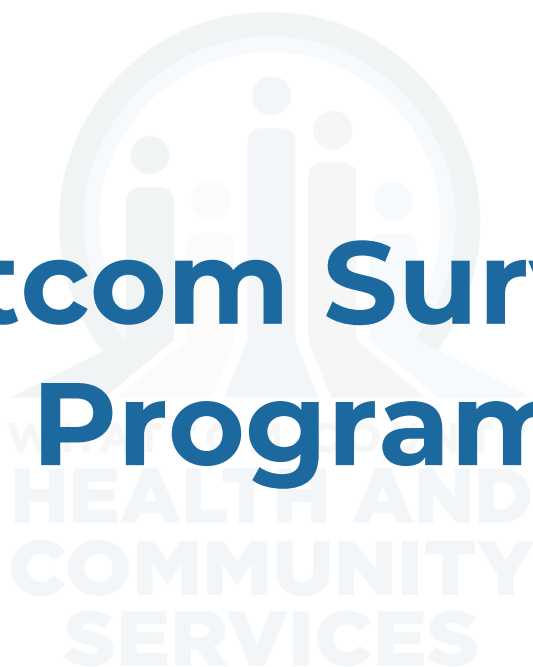


Fall Hospitalizations

Whatcom County, all ages



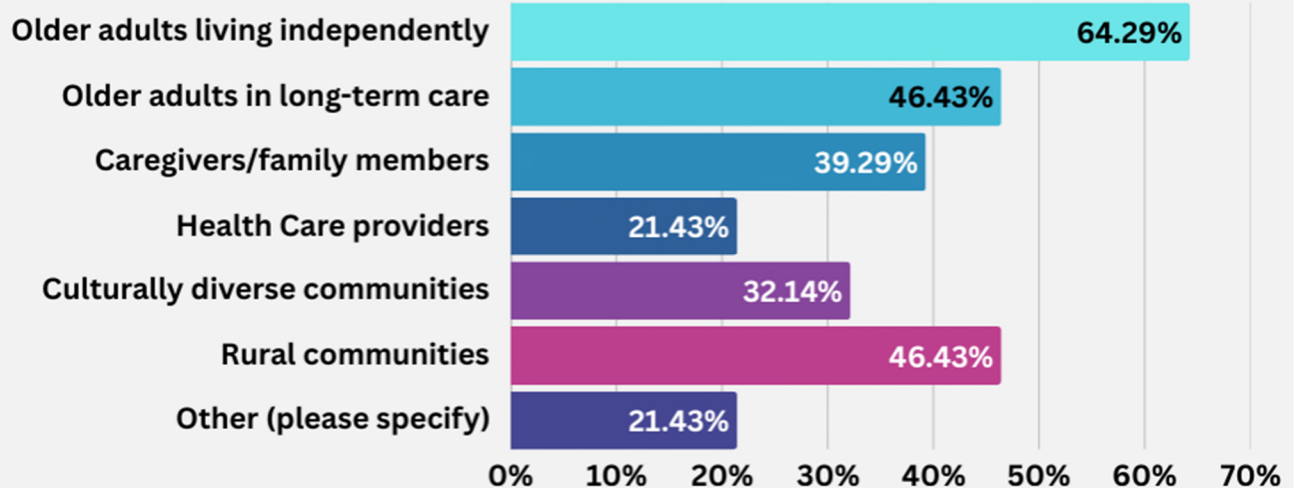
Whatcom Survey on Falls Programming



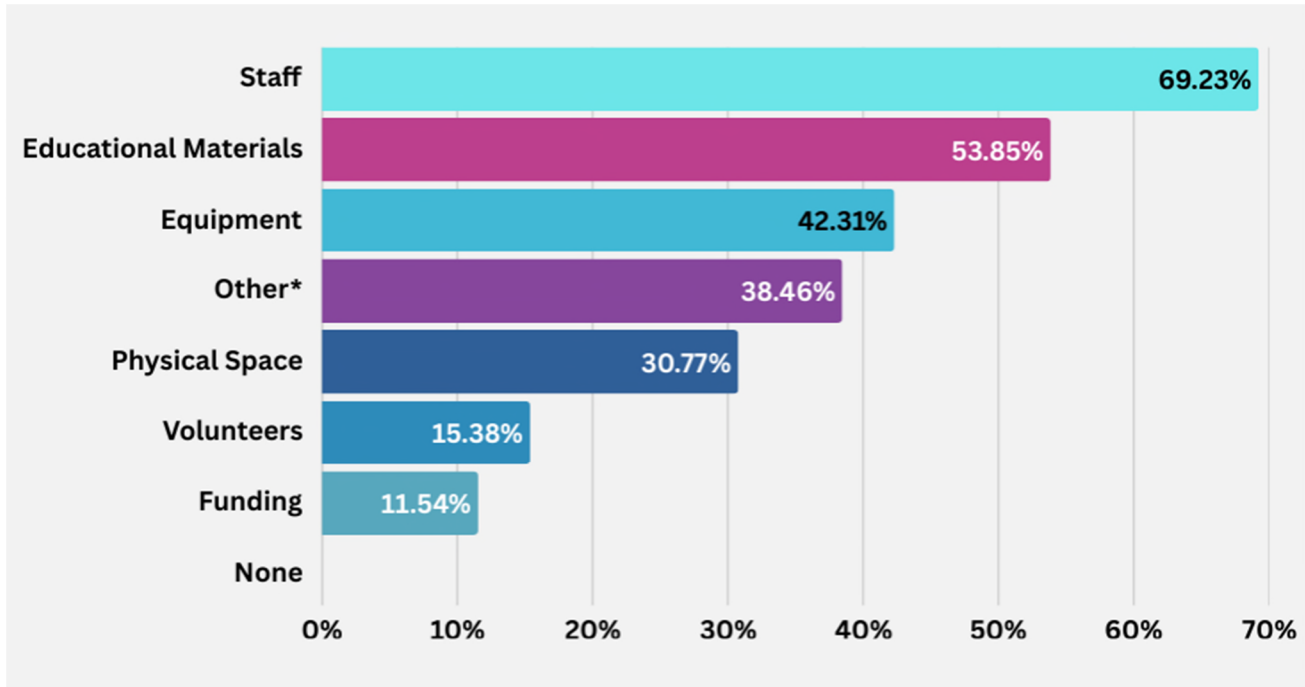
Survey Respondents:

Aging Well Whatcom	PeaceHealth - Home Health
Cascade Ambulance Service	Right at Home Northwest
Christian Health Care Center	Silverado Bellingham
Habitat for Humanity WC	Stay Home Improvements, LLC
Health Ministries Network	Summit Place Assisted Living Facility
Lummi Island Health & Wellness	In-Home One-on-One Balance
Nooksack Indian Tribe	Training & Community Workshops
NW WA Indian Health Board	Whatcom County EMS
NWRC	Whatcom Council on Aging
Opportunity Council	Whatcom Family YMCA
Palliative Care Institute	Whatcom Transportation Authority
PeaceHealth	

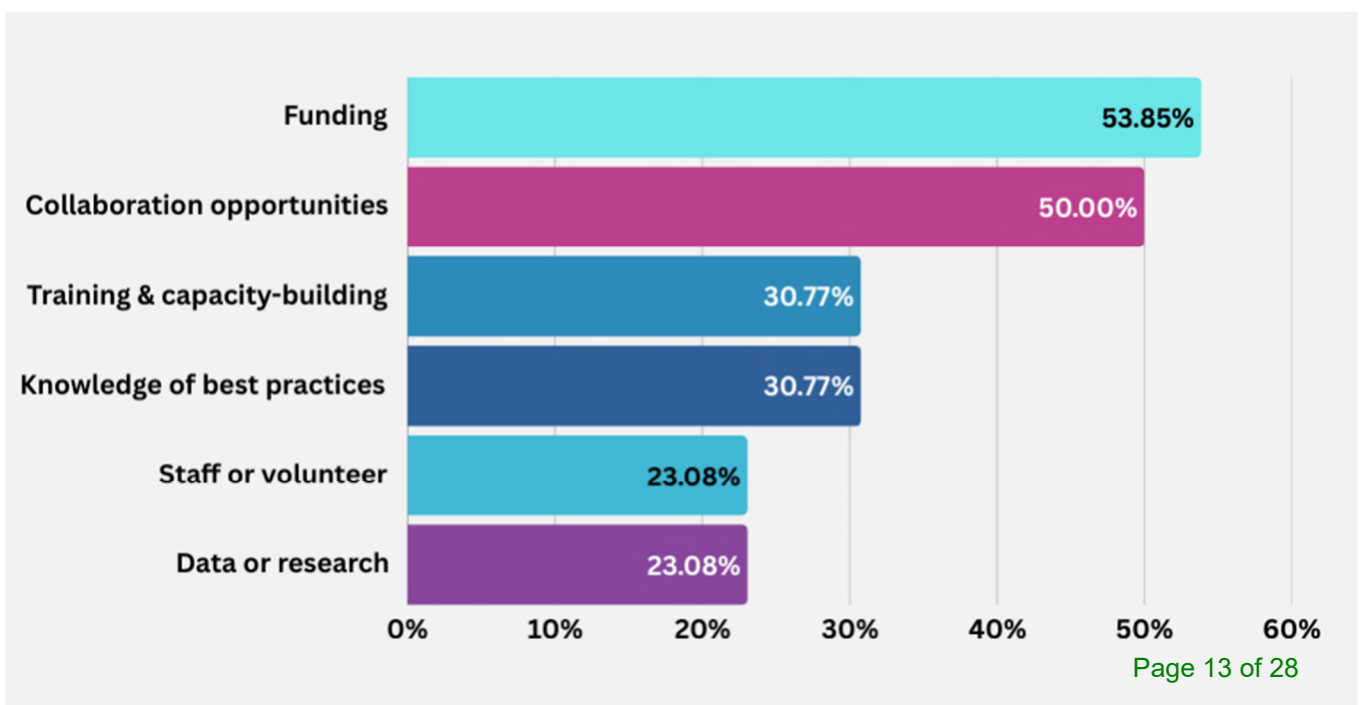
Which groups do you primarily serve? (select all that apply)



What resources does your organization have to support fall prevention? (select all that apply)



What barriers or challenges do you face in delivering or expanding fall prevention? (select all that apply)



What opportunities do you see for greater impact in Whatcom County?



Strengthen health care connections



Coordinate and leverage existing capacity



Expand equitable community access



Address home safety barriers

*“We have **staff that can teach balance** - funding would be helpful to provide opportunities throughout Whatcom County!” - Survey Participant*

What We Heard



Fall prevention is a **high priority** across communities



Effective prevention requires **multi-sector collaboration**



Many communities organize this work through **collaborative coalitions**



The work continues because the **need is undeniable**

Questions?



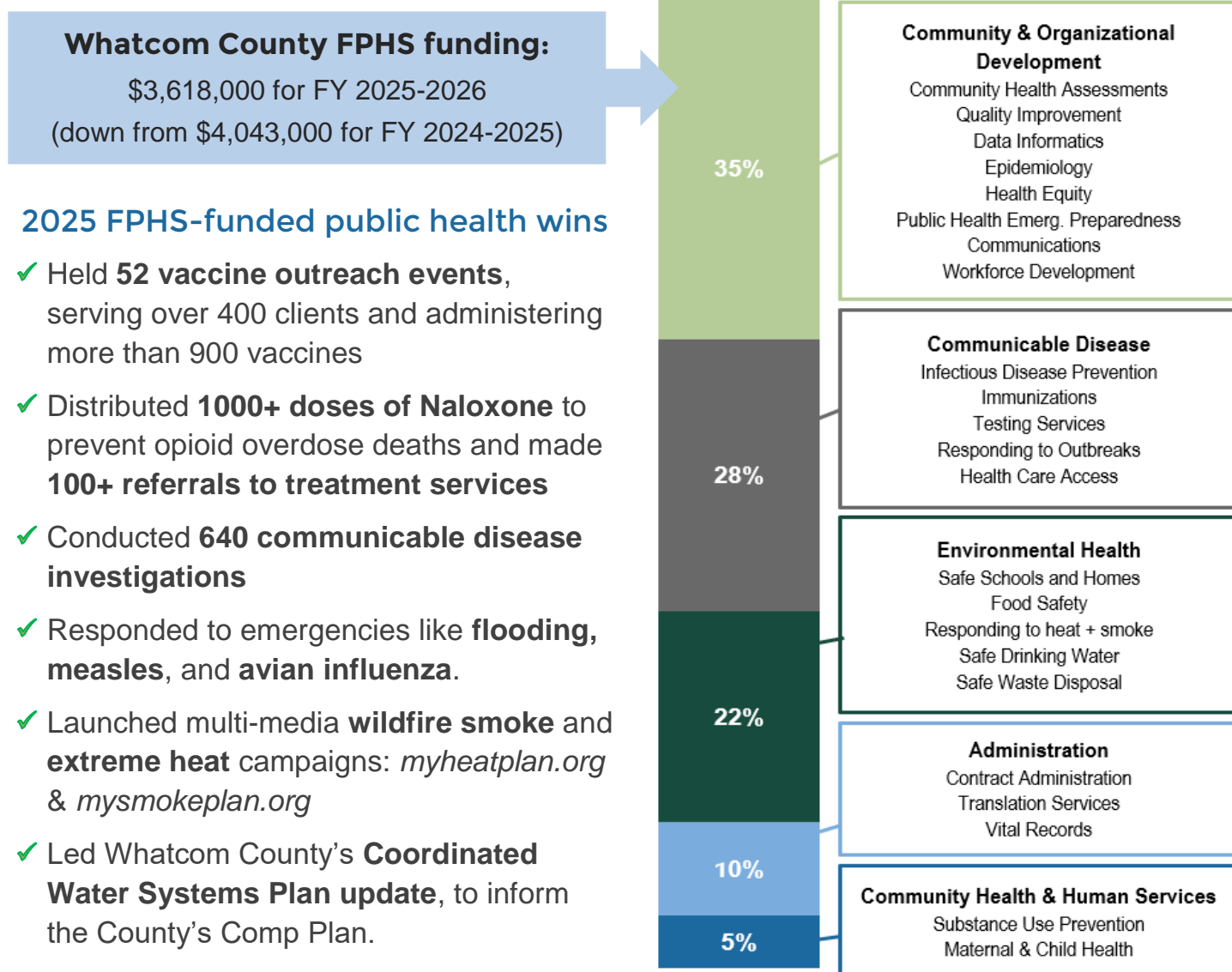


Foundational Public Health Services (FPHS)

Investments and Community Impact in Whatcom County

Investing in public health through FPHS protects our community in Whatcom County. FPHS funding helps ensure we are prepared to respond to public health emergencies, mitigate environmental health hazards, prevent the spread of disease, and keep people informed and empowered to make healthy choices.

Without FPHS funding, our capacity to protect and support the health of our community – especially our most vulnerable residents – would be severely compromised.



FPHS funding helps keep Whatcom County healthy & safe

Strong public health workforce and community partnerships:

- Allows us to recruit and retain highly skilled subject matter experts in outbreak response and disease investigation; epidemiology and population health data; public health emergency preparedness and response; nurses and health educators; and many others.
- Supports collaboration with community partners like health care providers, social service organizations, emergency services, law-enforcement, and schools to address important topics like substance use, housing, child care, and more.

Ability to effectively prevent and slow the spread of communicable diseases:

- Allows us to respond quickly to emerging threats like measles, avian influenza, and respiratory illnesses like RSV and influenza.
- Stabilizes our Immunizations Program, so we can provide frequent, accessible vaccine clinics in the community.
- Funds active and latent Tuberculosis (TB) treatment, easing burden on local healthcare systems.
- Enhances capacity to respond to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially among vulnerable groups.
- Funds interpretation services and translation of outreach materials, ensuring that all community members can access critical health information and services.

Strategic, community and data-driven community health improvement:

- Funds Community Health Assessments (CHA) and Improvement Planning to gather quantitative and qualitative data so we can understand public health needs and disparities in our community and work collaboratively with partners across sectors to identify community and data-driven solutions to public health challenges. We are currently planning for our next CHA, which will launch in April 2026.
- Funds the creation and maintenance of *Whatcom Community Health Insights*, a data platform with over 150 indicators of public health and well-being in Whatcom County highlighting community health challenges and disparities between groups of people and areas in which we are doing well.

What losing FPHS funding would mean for Whatcom County

FPHS is the backbone of our public health work. Without it, our ability to respond to outbreaks, support vulnerable communities, and prevent serious illnesses is at serious risk. *We can no longer rely on federal support for science-based public health, and are facing devastating cuts to vital programs. We need FPHS now more than ever.*

If FPHS funding is reduced:

- Our vaccine and disease investigation programs will be significantly weakened, *just as infectious diseases like measles are on the rise.*
- Vulnerable populations may lose access to lifesaving outreach and care.
- Public health workforce stability will erode.
- Local healthcare systems will bear increased burdens without the prevention work led by our department.

For more information, contact:

Champ Thomaskutty, WCHCS Department Director
cthomas@co.whatcom.wa.us | 360-739-9307



WHATCOM COUNTY
**HEALTH AND
COMMUNITY
SERVICES**



2026 PHAB (Public Health Advisory Board) Workplan

1. 2025 Review

- a) Evaluation of 2025 Workplan
- b) Discussion of new Workplan for 2026 (to be voted on)
- c) Adopt new model for PHAB (Vital Conditions)

2. Membership Recruitment/Recommendations to Council and the development of a process for inclusion.

- a) Determine PHAB representation needed based on
 - a. RCW 70.46.140 (Community health advisory boards-Membership-Meetings)
 - i. Section (3) stating broad representation of the character of the community and a balance of membership, and listing preferences (tribal, racial, ethnic and other minorities).
 - b. Whatcom County Code 24.01.051 (Health department advisory board created)
 - i. Section B (4) listing criteria for selection and preferences
 - ii. Section B (5) designating active recruitment of advisory board members in a manner that solicits broad diversity....
 - c. Vital Conditions model
- b) Consider commitment to the work
- c) Consider community connections to advance adopted model and MAPP 2.0 engagement
- d) Consider possible conflicts of interest

3. Develop subcommittees to address the following:

- a. **Continuation of Infrastructure Changes (2025-26)**
 - i. Revise PHAB By-Laws to reflect Whatcom County Codes
 - ii. Include contingency plan in event that LBOH reconfiguration occurs
- b. **Orientation of new members**
 - i. Review and revise Orientation Manual
 - ii. Educate on OPMA (Open Public Meetings Act) laws regarding communication and meetings
 - iii. Orientate to WCHCS (Whatcom County Health & Community services)
 - iv. Clarify Advisory group roles
 - v. Educate on CHA/CHIP/MAPP 2.0 process (including acronyms)
- c. **Communication**

- i. Website changes,
- ii. Biographies of members
- iii. Processes of communication (forms, resolution or ordinance development, internal communication)
- iv. Public facing education to access minutes and participate in meetings

d. Budget Review

- i. Processes

e. Training and Education

- i. WCHCS Division invitations (schedule out if possible)
- ii. NSACH and Medicaid changes
- iii. Foundational Public Health Services

f. CHA/CHIP/MAPP

- i. Reviews/evaluations
- ii. Lead for PHAB work in community
 - 1. Invite residents with lived experiences
 - 2. Host community listening sessions

g. 2026 Retreat Planning (Spring 2026?)

4. Identify key Whatcom County public health priorities

- i. Identify processes for bring issues to PHAB (forms, timelines)
- ii. Develop/vote/submit advisory memos to Whatcom County Council and WCHCS

5. Annual Report and new 2027 Workplan



Whatcom County

COUNTY COURTHOUSE
311 Grand Avenue, Ste #105
Bellingham, WA 98225-4038
(360) 778-5010

Agenda Bill Master Report

File Number: AB2025-872

File ID:	AB2025-872	Version:	1	Status:	Substitute Amended and Approved
File Created:	12/26/2025	Entered by:	KSmith@co.whatcom.wa.us		
Department:	Council Office	File Type:	Resolution		
Assigned to:	Council (Special)			Final Action:	12/30/2025
Agenda Date:	12/30/2025			Enactment #:	RES 2025-050
Related Files:					

Primary Contact Email: ksmith@co.whatcom.wa.us

TITLE FOR AGENDA ITEM:

Resolution authorizing the use of Healthy Children’s Fund dollars for flood relief assistance for families with vulnerable children

SUMMARY STATEMENT OR LEGAL NOTICE LANGUAGE:

n/a

HISTORY OF LEGISLATIVE FILE

Date:	Acting Body:	Action:	Sent To:
12/30/2025	Council (Special)	SUBSTITUTE APPROVED AS AMENDED	
		Aye: 7 Buchanan, Byrd, Donovan, Elenbaas, Galloway, Scanlon, and Stremier	
		Nay: 0	

Attachments: Proposed Resolution, Substitute Resolution, 2nd Substitute Resolution, Memo - Whatcom Long Term Recovery Group

RESOLUTION NO. 2025-050

**AUTHORIZING THE USE OF HEALTHY CHILDREN’S FUND DOLLARS TO
PROTECT VULNERABLE YOUNG CHILDREN AFFECTED BY FLOODING**

WHEREAS, Whatcom County experienced severe winter storms, high winds, flooding, mudslides, and landslides beginning December 9, 2025 (herein “2025 Storm Events”); and

WHEREAS, the winter storms beginning on December 9, 2025 led to evacuations, property damage, and disruption of daily life for Whatcom County residents and has intensified the vulnerability of many families with young children in our community; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu issued a Proclamation of Emergency on December 9, 2025; and

WHEREAS, the availability of state and federal assistance is unknown at this point and, if available, will likely be slow to arrive; and

WHEREAS, the Healthy Children’s Fund is a voter-approved property tax levy to support early childhood learning and care and for the support of vulnerable children; and

WHEREAS, for purposes of this resolution, “vulnerable children” refers to children aged 0-5 and their immediate families impacted by the 2025 Storm Events and as otherwise consistent with the Healthy Children’s Fund ordinance and administrative guidelines, including but not limited to income level, housing instability, or developmental risk; and

WHEREAS, the Council desires to provide rapid support to flood-impacted families with vulnerable children by using funds from the Healthy Children’s Fund; and

WHEREAS, expenditures that stabilize housing, address health and safety needs, and reduce trauma for children aged 0–5 following a disaster directly support the Healthy Children’s Fund purposes of promoting early childhood health, development, and family stability; and

WHEREAS, although the Healthy Children’s Fund is not intended to function as a disaster relief program, limited and targeted use of funds to stabilize families with vulnerable young children following a declared emergency is consistent with the Fund’s purpose; and

WHEREAS, the immediate needs of flood-impacted families with vulnerable children are not being met by current disaster relief funding systems; and

WHEREAS, ensuring every Whatcom County child gets a healthy start is a fundamental goal of the Healthy Children’s Fund; and

WHEREAS, the use of Healthy Children’s Fund dollars under this resolution is intended to supplement, and not supplant, other local, state, or federal disaster assistance programs; however, the Council supports the reimbursement of any Healthy Children’s Fund dollars used to support families impacted by the 2025 Storm Events with state or federal disaster relief dollars that arrive at a later date; and

WHEREAS, the Council expects little to no long-term impact on funds available through the Healthy Children’s Fund due to the limited nature of the proposed use, the potential for partial or full reimbursement through future state or federal disaster relief funding, and the continued prioritization of core early childhood investments.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council requests the County Executive to use up to \$750,000 from the Healthy Children’s Fund to provide disaster relief assistance related to the 2025 Storm Events to families with vulnerable children aged 0–5 years, in a manner consistent with purposes of the Healthy Children’s Fund, and that the Executive report back to Council on expenditures, outcomes, and any reimbursement received from state or federal sources; and

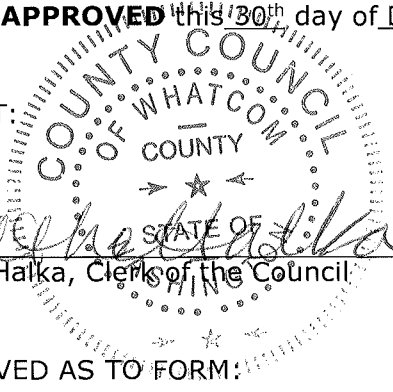
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council supports the reimbursement of any Healthy Children’s Fund dollars, pursuant to the terms of the Healthy Children’s Fund, used to support families impacted by the 2025 Storm Events with state or federal disaster relief dollars that arrive at a later date; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this expenditure from the Healthy Children’s fund shall supplement, and not supplant, other local, state, or federal disaster assistance programs; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that this expenditure from the Healthy Children's Fund shall be made equitably available and accessible to all flood-impacted families with vulnerable children ages 0-5 years, from all backgrounds, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

APPROVED this 30th day of December, 2025.

ATTEST:



Cathy Halka
Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Kaylee Galloway
Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Kimberly Thulin by email 12/30/25-ks

Civil Deputy Prosecutor

RESOLUTION NO. _____

**REQUESTING WASHINGTON STATE OFFICIALS AND WHATCOM COUNTY'S
CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION WORK TO SECURE THE RELEASE OF APPROVED
HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT PROGRAM FUNDS FOR WHATCOM COUNTY
HOMEOWNERS**

WHEREAS, in November 2021, Whatcom County experienced historic floods, which displaced numerous county residents and resulted in significant damages to homes, businesses, and infrastructure; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) provides funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments to help communities rebuild in ways that reduce or mitigate future disaster losses; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County is eligible to receive HMGP funding through FEMA Federally Declared Disaster Number DR-4635-WA; and

WHEREAS, in response to the November 2021 flooding, the Whatcom County River and Flood Division worked with the small cities of Everson, Ferndale, and Sumas to identify and prioritize flood-damaged properties throughout the County for mitigation assistance and evaluate eligibility for acquisition or elevation funding through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program; and

WHEREAS, FEMA-funded property acquisitions allow local jurisdictions such as Whatcom County to purchase eligible properties in flood-prone areas from willing sellers for conversion to open space and conservation of natural floodplain functions; and

WHEREAS, home elevations are a tool that can be used to mitigate flooding and increase resiliency for property owners who do not wish to leave their homes and desire to stay in their communities; and

WHEREAS, in April 2022, the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District (FCZD) submitted application 4635-01-R for FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funding to elevate a total of 12 properties in Sumas, Ferndale, and unincorporated Whatcom County that were substantially damaged during the 2021 flood; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County FCZD submitted two additional applications (4635-02-R Elevation and 4635-03-R Acquisition) for HMGP funding in August 2022 to acquire five properties and elevate 16 additional properties at high risk for repeated flooding in Sumas, Ferndale, and unincorporated Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, FEMA approved Whatcom County's April 2022 grant application (4635-01-R), allowing elevations to move forward for the selected properties; and

WHEREAS, the August 2022 grant applications have been approved by both the Washington Emergency Management Division (WEMD), which administers HMGP grant agreements, and FEMA; and

WHEREAS, despite these approvals from WEMD and FEMA, funding for the remaining property acquisitions and elevations remains stalled due to a new requirement that all grants over \$100,000 must receive final authorization from the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security; and

WHEREAS, more than four years have elapsed since the 2021 floods, and Whatcom County families are still waiting to receive aid needed to protect their homes from future flooding impacts; and

WHEREAS, the period of performance for Federally Declared Disaster Number DR-4635-WA ends April 5, 2026; and

WHEREAS, WEMD requested an extension of the timeline on Whatcom County's behalf, but that request has not yet been granted; and

WHEREAS, while funding for the home elevations has remained stalled, Whatcom County experienced another round of devastating floods in December 2025, causing additional damages, emotional distress, and financial strain for homeowners who never fully recovered from the 2021 floods; and

WHEREAS, lengthy administrative delays in the distribution of disaster recovery funds unnecessarily prolong the suffering of families trying to rebuild and recover from a declared emergency and leaves them vulnerable to additional, preventable harms, including further flooding.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council respectfully requests that the Washington State Governor and Attorney General employ all available legal means to secure the immediate release of HMGP funds for Whatcom County grant applications 4635-02-R and 4635-03-R; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council respectfully requests that Washington’s United States Senators, Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, and Washington’s Second Congressional District Representative, Rick Larsen, work to secure the immediate release of the same.

ADOPTED this ____ day of _____, 2026

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Kimberly Thulin via email 2.2.2026 (JG)
Civil Deputy Prosecutor

**WHATCOM COUNTY
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE**

County Courthouse
311 Grand Avenue, Suite #108
Bellingham, WA 98225-4082



Satpal Singh Sidhu
County Executive

Memorandum

To: Whatcom County Council
Through: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
From: Jed Holmes, Public Affairs Manager
CC: Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive
Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Director
Date: January 15, 2026
RE: State Capital Budget Request for Flood Hazard Mitigation

Whatcom County has seen three substantial flood events since 2020. These include major Nooksack River flooding in February 2020, the catastrophic November 2021 disaster and again major flooding in December 2025, when the river saw its highest crest ever recorded at Cedarville.

While damage assessments for the 2025 event have not been completed, preliminary assessments show that 1,248 homes were impacted, including 159 with major or destroyed damage. Within these broader impacts, two residences were destroyed as the Nooksack River overtopped its banks in the foothills, sweeping homes and outbuildings downriver. Related business and commerce losses are estimated in the millions.

On January 27, Whatcom County submitted a State Capital Budget request to support early-action items within the flood hazard mitigation plan developed through the Floodplain Integrated Planning (FLIP) process. These projects will reduce flood risks for communities across all reaches of the watershed. These actions are also intended to benefit fish. The artificial constriction of the river's path has degraded fish habitat, and projects such as levee setbacks and side channel creation will improve habitat for endangered salmon runs in the Nooksack watershed.

Project Areas

The request includes the following project areas:

1. Acquisition of key properties to support flood risk reduction and habitat restoration projects (\$5 million).
2. Advance design of projects to reduce the flood damages to Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas and improve habitat (\$4 million). Projects may include:
 - Widening the corridor near Everson and mitigating impacts
 - Everson and Nooksack berms
 - Flood walls/floodproofing for critical facilities (city halls, feed mill)
3. Advance design of emergency access and drainage improvement projects (\$4 million). Projects may include:

- Relocating/replacing tide gate on Jordan's Creek
- Elevating portions of key access routes to Lummi Nation
- Access improvements to Nooksack Tribal housing

4. Advance design of projects from Everson to Interstate 5 to address flooding and habitat impacts (\$2 million). Projects may include:

- Setting back levees at constrictions or other actions to mitigate flow increase from early action project and improve habitat

The request is sponsored by our 42nd Legislative District delegation – Senator Shewmake, Representative Rule and Representative Timmons.

Next Steps

The Executive's Office has been in regular communication our state delegation and key legislative staff in support of this request, and we will continue to work with our lobbyist Josh Weiss to advocate for this funding.

Next steps for the County Council could include:

- Motion indicating support for the request
- Joint letter signed by Council Chair and County Executive
- Direct advocacy with state legislators (emails, calls)

Please address any questions regarding this request to Jed Holmes, Public Affairs Manager (jholmes@co.whatcom.wa.us).