

Resolution Declaring High Costs and Insufficient Access of Healthcare Services in Kitsap County are Public Health Crises

WHEREAS, the mission statement of the Kitsap Public Health District is to prevent disease and protect and promote the health of all people in Kitsap County; and

WHEREAS, all Kitsap residents should have equitable access to affordable and quality healthcare services; and

WHEREAS, many Kitsap residents encounter barriers to receiving needed and culturally competent healthcare services. These barriers include, but are not limited to, high and unpredictable costs, inadequate or unavailable insurance coverage, insufficient supply of local providers in multiple specialties, inconsistent access to interpreters or accommodations, and fear of discrimination; and

WHEREAS, the complexity of cost and reimbursement structures in our healthcare delivery system harms healthcare worker morale and recruitment at all levels, further depleting a stressed and insufficient workforce; and

WHEREAS, these increased costs, strained and diminished workforce, and inaccessible services in Kitsap constitute significant barriers to people receiving necessary care; and

WHEREAS, Kitsap Public Health District tracks and publishes data showing the County is underserved relative to the State and Nation in the number of hospital and emergency department beds, urgent care centers, and providers working in primary care, obstetrical and maternal care, mental health services, and additional service lines; and

WHEREAS, the inadequacy and inaccessibility of these needed services have been compounded by the closure of the St. Michael Medical Center Emergency Department in Bremerton in 2021 and the subsequent closure of Naval Hospital Bremerton birthing center in 2022; and

WHEREAS, these barriers to receiving needed services lead to disparate and often poor health outcomes, disproportionately impacting historically excluded groups, racial and ethnic groups, people of limited economic means and disabilities, including both healthcare workers and the Kitsap public; and

WHEREAS, Kitsap Public Health District publishes data that confirm Kitsap residents are well below State averages for certain indicators, with only 52% of pregnant Kitsap residents receiving adequate prenatal care (compared to 70% for Washington State) at a time when gestational hypertension rates nearly doubled from 2016 to 2021 in Kitsap County; and

WHEREAS, Kitsap Public Health District tracks and publishes data that show increasing rates of mental health disorders, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and opioid related illness and death; and

WHEREAS, there were indications of a stressed local healthcare system in Kitsap County before the COVID-19 pandemic, after three years of pandemic response, the healthcare system is further strained and at times overwhelmed; and


WHEREAS, the Kitsap Public Health Board passed Resolution 2021-01 declaring racism a public health crisis and is committed to eliminating inequities and ensuring equitable access to needed health services for all Kitsap County residents,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Kitsap Public Health Board declares high costs and insufficient access of healthcare services in Kitsap County are public health crises. Furthermore, the Health Board and the Kitsap Public Health District commit to work to advance a public health approach to address cost and access barriers to receiving healthcare in Kitsap County, including but not limited to:

- Using the results of the KPHD Local Healthcare Systems Needs Assessment (an independent study), formulate and implement initiatives that address and reduce deficiencies in healthcare services in Kitsap; and
- Support processes which advance public health and healthcare related infrastructure improvements, including but not limited to projects such as MultiCare's Bremerton emergency facility, Peninsula Community Health Services' medical respite and employee housing facilities, Olympic College's healthcare educational complex in Poulsbo, the CommonSpirit Virginia Mason Franciscan Health hybrid Emergency Room - Urgent Care facility on Kitsap Way in Bremerton, and the expansion of St. Michael Medical Center to build all beds approved through the Certificate of Need process; and
- Support reinvestment in our local community of healthcare profits generated in Kitsap County; and
- Support and champion public-private partnerships and multi-sector models for innovative work for maternity, mental health, substance abuse, and sexually transmitted infections; and
- Increase education and generate co-created guidance for high quality wrap-around services, including social, medical, psychiatric, nursing, behavioral health, and substance use disorder treatment services, in combined facilities; and
- Promote strategic partnerships between federal, state, and local governmental public health agencies, federally qualified health centers, healthcare systems, mental health and addiction treatment services, and academia; and
- Champion efforts to increase the transparency and affordability of health costs; and

- Support opportunities to strengthen the healthcare workforce, including, but not limited to, support for loan repayment and career advancement programs, increased educational opportunities especially for local students from underrepresented communities and with diverse lived experiences, and recruitment and retention incentives; and
- Champion policy and system level change that increases funding for public health, additional important services, and preventive services.

APPROVED: July 11, 2023



Mayor Becky Erickson, Chair
Kitsap Public Health Board