

January 15, 2025

Dear Valued WA-DOH Partner:

As my time serving as Secretary of Health for the great state of Washington comes to a close this week, I want to thank you for being such an integral part of this journey. It has been an absolute honor to serve in Governor Inslee's administration, and I could not have asked for a better agency to lead in the Washington State Department of Health (WA-DOH).

As you will recall, my tenure started in December of 2020 when COVID-19 vaccines were just starting to arrive in our state. It was a difficult time for all of us and yet we had the hope of ending this pandemic before us. It took time but through our combined collaboration and hard work, we were able to save lives, and see our state recover from this difficult period of time.

In late 2022, WA-DOH launched our nationally acclaimed [\*Transformational Plan: A Vision for Health in Washington State\*](#) centered on the cornerstone values of Equity, Innovation, and Engagement with five key priorities that set the stage for the road ahead.

In operationalizing the *Transformational Plan*, we took to heart the importance of transforming our agency, our work, and our relationship with partners. We know it was not easy, and yet it was critical so we could handle a changed world around us. Some of the [accomplishments](#) were in building capacity and resilience in responding to emergencies, while others were centered around modernizing our agency, so it was ready not just for today but for the often-uncertain challenges of tomorrow.

In only a few short years, WA-DOH launched important initiatives such as *Be Well WA*, *Care-A-Van*, *Power of Providers*, *WA-Notify*, *The Community Collaborative*, *Teen Health Hub WA*, and many others. We made tremendous progress in connecting with partners in launching initiatives such as our first-ever Office of Tribal Public Health & Relations, the statewide 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline with the nation's first *Native & Strong Lifeline*, creation of four regional health offices, the nation's first state Office of Global & One Health, not to mention important work centered around healthcare access, reproductive health, climate, rural health, academia, and the private sector. Along with partners, we remained committed to science and prevention throughout.

Raising the visibility and value of health-related work was key for our agency. This included increased communications and engagement efforts such as a stronger presence on social media, traditional media, and the launch of an ultramodern website with bold branding. We launched [Public Health Connects](#), a podcast type series to underscore the importance of health connectedness and leadership perspectives. If this wasn't proof enough, a light-hearted – yet important – engagement moment was seeing the very Health Secretary joining the UW and WSU mascots for pushups during this past year's Apple Cup!

Modernization of data systems and enacting operational efficiencies were additional areas of focus. In this regard, WA-DOH took critical steps to advance innovation and ensure technology investments. These were leveraged to reduce delays in healthcare credentialing backlogs, taking on behavioral health challenges, creating dashboards for opioids and respiratory diseases, and the like. While we recognized having the tools and technologies were necessary, they were not sufficient without supporting the people – especially the health workforce – doing the important work across our state.

Indeed, all these efforts have translated into countless benefits from and recognitions for our agency's work and the work of our partners, but most importantly they have resulted in our ability to connect with everyday Washingtonians and help them live healthier lives. The recent launch of [Be Well WA](#) underscored the importance of health and wellness efforts for everyone.

As my time as Secretary of Health comes to an end, I am proud of what we have accomplished together and leave behind a dedicated team that carries the passion for our work. There have been countless challenges, and we have risen to meet each of them with determination and collective spirit.

We all know that there is much that divides us as a nation, and yet there is so much we can accomplish together. When we dream big and are willing to “reimagine health”, we can do the impossible. I maintain that while public health is inherently political, it does not have to be partisan.

Thank you again for joining us along this journey. I am deeply honored to have worked with you and wish you a bright, rewarding, and hopeful future ahead. Please stay in touch.

Best,



Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH  
Secretary of Health  
Washington