



October 8, 2025 Community Collaborative Meeting

Agenda

- 3:32 Welcome, Land and Labor Acknowledgement with Vincent Perez, Community Thought Partner
- 3:35 Starleen Maharaj-Lewis, Office of Infectious Disease and James Tillet, Chair of the Syndemic Planning Group
- 3:50 Brittany Tybo, Nutrition Services Office Director- Federal Shutdown Impact on WIC
- 4:10 Dr. Tao Kwan Gett, State Health Officer; Dr. Jamilia Sherls, Office of Immunization Director
Dr. James Lewis, Kathryn Tomas-Bugayong, Maya Quintero- Snohomish County Health Dept.
- 4:10 Announcements and Close

Meeting slides are available on WaPortal: <https://waportal.org/partners/community-collaborative/meeting-notes-and-slides>

Meeting Recap

Welcome and Land and Labor Acknowledgement

The October session opened on a note of warmth and optimism as participants logged in to the soulful rhythm of *“Ooh Child (Things Are Gonna Get Easier)”* by The Five Stairsteps. Vincent Perez welcomed attendees and reflected on how this music captured the Collaborative’s spirit, centering resilience and possibility even in challenging times. He then invited participants to share their favorite part of autumn in the chat, sparking responses about crisp air, changing leaves, and soup season. Vincent provided a land and labor acknowledgment honoring the Coast Salish and other Native peoples who have stewarded these lands for generations despite systemic erasure.

Washington Syndemic Planning Group

This presentation from Starleen Maharaj-Lewis, Office of Infectious Disease and James Tillet, who is chair of the Syndemic Planning Group opened with a poll: *“What is a syndemic?”*. The



correct answer described a *syndemic* as the interaction of multiple health conditions worsened by social and structural inequities.

Options	Responses ↕
A state where multiple, co-occurring health conditions interact with each other and worsene...	43/59 (73%)
A sudden outbreak of one infectious disease across multiple regions	9/59 (15%)
Two or more unrelated health conditions occurring at the same time, without influencing ea...	7/59 (12%)
A new type of workout routine that combines synchronized dance and aerobic exercise	0/59 (0%)

Key Points from the discussion:

- **Definition & Framework:** A syndemic approach recognizes that HIV, hepatitis, STIs, and drug-use health outcomes are inseparable from housing instability, stigma, poverty, and racism.
- **Office of Infectious Disease’s Approach:** Guided by the four pillars — *Diagnose, Treat, Prevent, Respond* — DOH is moving toward integrated systems of care that respond to overlapping epidemics.
- **Community-Led Governance:** The WSPG is a 23-member advisory group composed of individuals with lived experience who co-design solutions, serve on review committees, and ensure DOH decisions reflect real-world impact.
- **Innovation Committees:** Members drive new approaches to harm reduction, sexual health, and stigma reduction by uniting state data and community knowledge.
- **Centering Lived Experience:** Starleen celebrated the leadership and resilience of WSPG members; James reflected on the group’s collective voice as a “policy partner, not just an advisory body.”

Community Questions:

- “How do syndemics differ from epidemics or pandemics?” — James explained that syndemics involve the *interaction* between health issues and social conditions, not just the diseases themselves.
- “How does WSPG ensure equity across so many focus areas?” — Starleen shared that targeted universalism guides the group’s planning, ensuring that marginalized communities shape every initiative.
- Attendees shared appreciation for the group’s model, noting its potential as a statewide template for participatory governance.



Resources Shared:

- [WA DOH Syndemic Planning Group](#)
- Join the November 25 WSPG General Meeting (6:00–7:30 p.m.)
- Contact: syndemic@doh.wa.gov or starleen.maharaj-lewis@doh.wa.gov

WIC Program and Federal Shutdown Update

Brittany Tybo, Nutrition Services Office Director including WIC addressed the federal budget impasse and its [impact on WIC families statewide](#). Brittany emphasized that while essential food benefits remain funded for now, administrative budgets face constraints.

Key Points:

- Contingency funds will sustain operations through late October; families should continue using the WIC Shopper App as usual.
- Administrative reimbursements will be issued retroactively once federal funds are released.
- DOH is tracking regional effects and collaborating with local health jurisdictions (LHJs) to prevent service gaps.
- Brittany encouraged creativity exploring philanthropic or public-private support if the shutdown persists.

Community Questions:

- *“Are there any items removed from the approved WIC food list?”* Brittany clarified that all existing WIC food benefits remain available. The contingency plan protects participant access to foods already authorized under the federal food package. She emphasized that DOH’s highest priority is ensuring participants continue to shop and redeem benefits without interruption.
- *“Which areas are most affected by funding delays?”* Brittany noted that the impact is primarily administrative, not participant-facing. Local agencies (especially smaller rural ones) are temporarily fronting operational costs — staff hours, clinic space, outreach — until federal funds resume. DOH is tracking these cases and preparing “after-the-fact” contracts to reimburse agencies once the continuing resolution passes.
- *“Can philanthropists or community foundations help bridge the gap?”* Brittany confirmed that DOH is open to discussions with private funders, philanthropies, and public-private coalitions that could temporarily supplement outreach or service navigation. However, WIC food benefits themselves can only be issued through federal funds — so philanthropic aid would focus on staff support, communications, or transportation, not the vouchers or e-benefits.
- *“Are WIC nonprofits eligible for workplace giving campaigns?”* Brittany confirmed that local WIC partners if nonprofits may be listed in corporate or state employee giving



programs. DOH is encouraging awareness efforts so staff and community members can direct donations locally if they choose to support WIC operations during the pause.

- *“How can families in Benton-Franklin County access WIC support?”* The **Benton-Franklin Health District** continues to operate all WIC offices with staff onsite and benefits active. Brittany encouraged anyone needing updates to call their local office or use the **WIC Shopper App**, which remains fully functional.

DOH shared a [short survey](#) for organizations and advocates interested in contributing to contingency planning.

West Coast Health Alliance and Immunization Updates

State Health Officer Dr. Tao Kwan-Gett started by sharing the role of the Washington Department of Health in the public health ecosystem. He then provided an update on the West Coast Health Alliance that links Washington’s work with Oregon, California, and Hawaii. The Alliance is committed to ensuring that public health recommendations are guided by safety, efficacy, transparency, access, and trust. Its initial focus has been on aligning immunization recommendations for COVID-19, influenza, and RSV that are informed by respected national medical organizations. Dr. Tao also shared details of the statewide standing order for COVID-19 vaccine that helps anyone 6 months and older get the COVID-19 vaccine in Washington without a prescription.

Following this, Jamilia Sherls, Director of the Office of Immunization, shared respiratory vaccine recommendations for this year, and updates on vaccine access and coverage. COVID-19, flu, and RSV vaccines remain covered under Apple Health, Medicare and most private insurers, and uninsured adults (19-64 y/o) can receive vaccines through the [Adult Vaccine Program](#). Jamilia also shared details of a new [Respiratory Immunization Dashboard](#) tracks statewide uptake and demographic trends.

Community Questions:

- *“Where can uninsured residents get vaccinated?”* – DOH directed attendees to the Adult Vaccine Program [Provider Map](#) and county health departments.
- *“Will the West Coast Alliance conduct vaccine impact research?”* – DOH noted that Alliance members share data and evaluation frameworks to strengthen evidence-based policy.
- *“Is Washington still pushing COVID-19 vaccines?”* – Speakers clarified that vaccination remains a key prevention strategy, supported by ongoing data on safety and efficacy.
- Several attendees echoed gratitude for the transparency around coverage and provider information.

Resources Shared:

- [Adult Vaccine Program](#) and [Provider Map](#)
- [WA Public Health System Overview](#)
- [DOH Newsroom: Concerns Over ACIP Recommendations and Equity](#)



- [Standing Orders | Washington State DOH](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs – Public \(PDF\)](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQs – Providers \(PDF\)](#)
- [Vaccine Provider Locations](#)
- [Health Care Provider FAQ](#)
- Contact: oi@doh.wa.gov

Snohomish County Health Department

James Lewis, Health Officer at Snohomish County, explained that local health departments' roles in immunizations vary across the country. While many directly provided immunizations and other clinical services in the past, Washington's local health departments largely moved away from this model after the 2008 recession and the launch of the Affordable Care Act, expecting that residents would gain access to care through other avenues. This shift, combined with reduced state revenues, led to a decline in direct public health services. Recognizing that many people still lack "medical homes" or coverage, Snohomish County has been rebuilding its capacity to provide vaccines—particularly for uninsured and marginalized populations.

Kat Tomas-Bugayong, Clinic Manager provided an update on their new clinic that opened in May offering both in-clinic and outreach immunizations and other health services for adults and children. Snohomish is currently the only [Adult Vaccine Program](#) provider in the county, meaning uninsured individuals often come directly to them. They also provide including in-home vaccinations for truly homebound residents.

Maya Quintero shared more about the rest of the Snohomish team and its focus on increasing immunization rates in Snohomish County and beyond through holding back-to-school clinics for local school districts such as Monroe, Mukilteo, and Edmonds, tabling at community events and fairs. (Over 1,380 vaccines administered to 661 residents from June 2024 through August 2025!) Snohomish also manages vaccination records, provide Certificates of Immunization Status (CIS), enters historical and international vaccine records, and assists residents in accessing their immunization documentation.

Participants requested additional vaccine event details and ways to replicate Snohomish's community-based model statewide. James offered himself as a resource to anyone who would like to discuss this further.

Resources Shared:

- [Snohomish Vaccine Clinic Request Form](#)



Announcements and Close

Vincent shared the following updates:

- *Najma Abdi* joined as Workforce Pathways Consultant to support the Community Collaborative.
- The Community Collaborative Carceral Health Equity Workgroup is leading a session on Health Harms of Incarceration: Centering Lived Experience, Healing, and Action at Washington State Public Health Association on October 21 (2:00–3:30 p.m.) and invited those attending to join.
- **Community Updates:**
 - Senator Patty Murray’s office is collecting public health impact stories: [Share Your Story](#)
 - [Naloxone Vending Machine Project – Southwest ACH](#)
 - [Pathways to Flourishing](#) – mental and spiritual wellbeing resources
 - Upcoming Deaf & Hard of Hearing emergency preparedness workshop in Spokane (Nov. 8)

Vincent invited attendees to share input on what topics they’d like the Collaborative to explore in future sessions. He noted that the Community Collaborative’s strength lies in its ability to be responsive to members’ priorities and emerging public health issues.



Options	Responses ↕
DOH federal readiness group	16/38 (42%)
Governor's Executive Order on protecting immigrant rights	23/38 (61%)
DOH secretary priorities for the next year	18/38 (47%)
Governor's health policy	15/38 (39%)
Other – add to chat	2/38 (5%)

Vincent thanked participants for continuing to “do democracy together,” reminding everyone that this space only works because community voice and government accountability meet here. The Collaborative continues to serve as a bridge — not a transaction, but a partnership.

Closing Quote

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting our time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."- Lilla Watson, Gangulu activist