

April 8, 2026 Community Collaborative Meeting

Agenda

- 3:30 Welcome from Anna Franklin, Community Thought Partner
- 3:36 Remeka Jones and Melissa West, DOH, Community Collaborative Updates
- 3:55 Jasmine Alik, Yen Baynes, and Judith Barba Perez- Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities
- 4:15 Sierra Rotakhina, Environmental Justice Council
- 4:40 Tiara Ranson, PHSKC Health Equity Anti-Racism Community Advisory Group (HEARCAG)
- 5:00 Gratitude and Close

Meeting slides are available on WA Portal under the heading of the April 8 meeting: [Community Collaborative Presentation April. 8, 2026.](#)

Meeting Recap

Welcome

Participants joined the meeting to the sound of Dogon by Thandiswa.

Anna Franklin, Community Thought Partner and founder of Maji Rising, welcomed participants and shared some opening thoughts. “I've worked in healthcare for over 34 years, and in my work, I often sit at the intersection of community and systems, trying to translate, to connect, and sometimes holding that tension between what communities are asking for, and how institutions respond. I want to name that spaces like what we have here in the community collaborative don't just happen. They are built over time—through trust, consistency, and determination, especially when systems don't always meet us halfway. Today's conversation is going to include some important updates. But as we walk through this together, I want to invite us to stay grounded in what has made this space this space. And that's each of your voices, each of your lived experiences, and your expectations for what health should be.”

Anna then invited the group to share what wellness feels like to them. Participant responses included:

- Peace in mind and soul
- Laughing with my family
- Seen and heard
- Stability and ability to deal with stress

- Wellness feels like safety and empowerment
- Ease, energy, and joy
- Support and connection
- Having time, health, and energy to pursue passions, be creative, and connect with my community
- Wellness feels like the firmness of being supported and the softness of possibility
- Joy. Time and space to feel it and share it.

Anna shared that, for many people, wellness is not just clinical. It's truly being in spaces where you're not questioned, where you're known, where your culture is not accommodated—it's understood. Where healing does not just come from a prescription, it comes from connection, from language, from belonging. She shared a brief video where she experienced this on a recent trip to South Africa.

Community Collaborative Updates

Remeka Jones, Acting Executive Director for the Center for Community Relations and Equity at DOH, began by expressing gratitude for the time, energy, and effort that members of the Community Collaborative have brought to this space over the years. The contributions in community have been deeply appreciated.

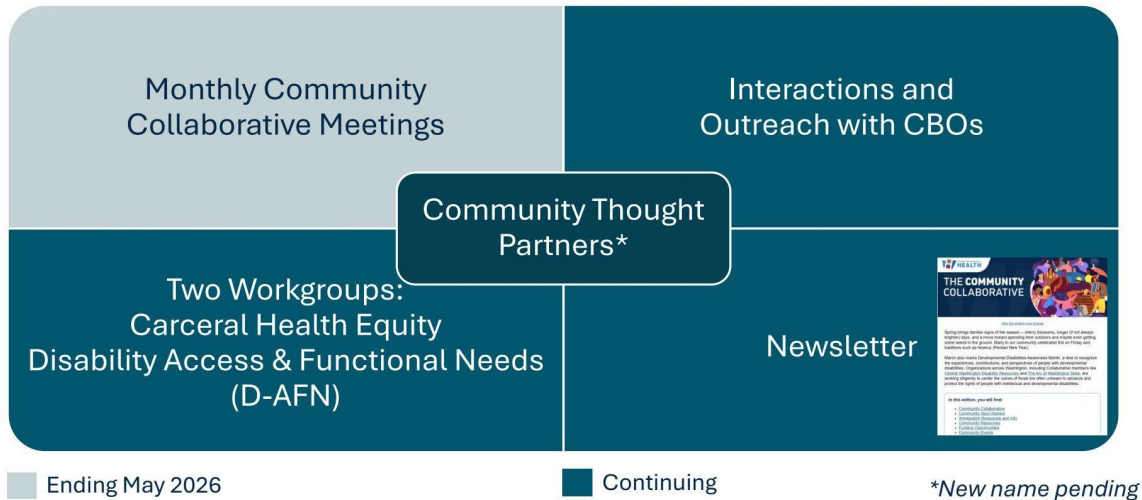
Remeka went on to note that, as everyone knows, this has been a challenging time—both at the federal level and state level—in regard to budget and funding. Recent cuts to federal funding and ongoing budget issues have had direct impacts on the state's ability to sustain services, invest in prevention, and meet the growing needs of communities.

In addition to federal impacts, this past legislative session was a challenging one. Difficult funding decisions have been made, and DOH has been impacted along with many other agencies and programs. Remeka affirmed to the group that DOH recognizes that these decisions have actual impacts on people, communities, and the work that we do.

Part of the reductions means fewer staff, which creates additional strain and impacts our ability to do the work, some programs have been protected because of community advocacy. However, other funding for community-facing work has been reduced or eliminated. Other programs have reduced funding, which affects staffing and implementation and certain services will continue but reach fewer people. As noted by Remeka, "I share this to acknowledge that these programs matter and were built on trust with communities."

Remeka shared a slide highlighting changes affecting the Community Collaborative.

Community Collaborative



Most notably, the monthly Community Collaborative meetings will end after May 2026. This space has been funded through a federal grant that expires in May. In the absence of another funding source, the difficult decision has been made to sunset this monthly meeting.

Remeka noted that the Community Collaborative has provided connection and hope to many community partners since 2021. Initially focused on vaccine implementation, the group expanded to address broader equity issues. Such as:

- Addressing barriers to accessing vaccines and improving vaccine distribution
- Influencing policies across the department, including our community compensation guidelines
- Helping to shape rulemaking and diversity in clinical trials
- Elevating community priorities, such as a recent statement on highlighting the impacts of chronic stress
- Resource sharing for immigrant and refugee communities
- Addressing relevant topics in communities as immigration, economic justice, carceral health, and mental health, among others.

Some elements of the Community Collaborative will continue—interactions and outreach with CBOs; the Carceral Health Equity and the Disability Access & Functional Needs workgroups; and the monthly newsletter. Remeka assured the group that even though we will no longer meet monthly, the relationships and trust we’ve built over the years do not go away.

Melissa West, manager of the Community Collaborative, shared that it is difficult to let go of a multicultural community space like this—especially at such an unsettled time in the world. For her, the Community Collaborative has been like a salve, helping her to stay whole and connected. The Collaborative has been a space where wisdom is held from the sharing of stories and diverse perspectives.

Melissa emphasized that key elements of the Community Collaborative will continue. She noted that programs across DOH are engaging with community members and leaders, and efforts are underway to better align this work and bring greater clarity and consistency across the department. She added that there will likely be a deeper discussion on this in May.

In preparation for the May meeting, Melissa invited the group to reflect on the following questions:

- What’s been most valuable to you about the Community Collaborative?
- What message(s) and stories would you like Thought Partners to carry forward in their advisory capacity to the Secretary of Health and other agency leaders?

[Please fill out this survey.](#)

Melissa shared that as the work evolves into new approaches, there is a strong commitment to honoring the community and the role each person plays. She emphasized that the strength of this work comes from those involved and underscored the importance of keeping the dialogue open moving forward.

Comments from the Community

“I don’t have a question, but a message to the rest of our Community Collaborative. You’re not going away, and we’re not going away. We’re going to be here. The Thought Partners will be here as well. But the power that is yielded within the community collaborative is immense. All of you who know me have heard me say it a million times: when I talk to our national partners, they’re all jealous of what we’ve created here. And the fact remains that the power that has been demonstrated by the things that we’ve been able to do with the funding that we had is remarkable. But it doesn’t need to come to an end. It may not be paid at this point, but I think there are some very skilled people in the Community Collaborative that will find ways to get this through. We’ve built the relationships, and those relationships are the most important thing. The organizing that so many of you are so good at—that’s not going to change. You’re still going to be able to do it. So, thank you—for not only doing it then, but for what you’re going to do. Because I think we can continue to pull these things together. We couldn’t have asked for a better agency and organization

in a state government than the Department of Health for what they've done and the red carpet that they rolled out for us. So, thank you. You've shown us that you want us with you."

"It's hard to see this meaningful space come to a close, but I'm deeply thankful for the experiences, partnerships, and shared purpose that have shaped it. Thank you, Melissa, for all that you do and for the care and dedication you've brought to this space."

"This has been a wonderful spot to get state information and bring back to my local organizations."

"Thank you so much for all you and your work have done for all of us, Melissa and everyone else whose love and support has given this space room to grow and thrive as it has."

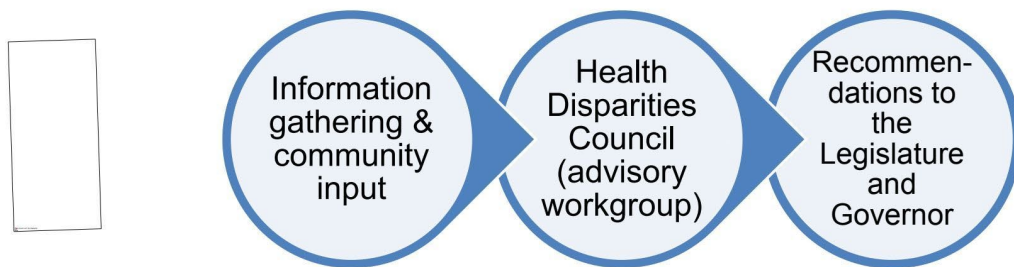
Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities

Linh Huynh, along with Yen Baynes and Jasmine Alik, provided an overview of the Council's role as a state-level advisory body focused on addressing social drivers of health that lead to health disparities/inequities. "Our council members and council staff, we connect with community to hear about real gaps in people's lives and their experiences—like access to resources, outcomes, and why gaps still exist or are widening," Linh said. "We work across agencies and with community to advance equity in systems that impact health. Everything that the Council wants to do, they want to do together with community and not separate from community."

Linh noted that the Council is not regulatory, so it does not create laws or rules, nor does it deliver direct services, although many Council member agencies are involved in these areas.

Responsibilities of the Council are illustrated below:

RESPONSIBILITIES



- **Create a state action plan.**
Identify priorities and create policy recommendations to eliminate health inequities by race/ethnicity and gender.
- Understand how **state government actions** reduce and contribute to health disparities.
- Recommend initiatives for improving the availability of **culturally and linguistically appropriate health literature and interpretative services.**



GOVERNOR'S INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HEALTH DISPARITIES

As an advisory working group, Linh noted, the Council provides information and recommendations to agencies, lawmakers, and the governor. It highlights health inequities, identifies priorities, and develops policy recommendations. It researches and shares recommended practices and policies with agencies so that they can be more coordinated around useful practices. It also creates informational resources on health equity topics.

Jasmine noted that, in addition to its quarterly meetings, the Council is working to expand and create more opportunities to connect with community. She mentioned, “although the Council was established 20 years ago, the Council did not get an engagement team until 2 years ago. So as our community engagement team is still growing our roots and building our relationships with organizations, other agencies, and community, we are trying to prioritize and make sure that the Council’s engagement is sustainable, that they’re not just one-offs, and that we are effectively sharing information back.”

Jasmine said that moving the Council from listening to coordinated action is also a priority, especially hearing about issues and barriers communities are experiencing. The Council is also interested in learning about strategies that community partners are utilizing and exploring how to support those efforts through the various channels to which the Council and its individual members have access. Jasmine encouraged members of the Community Collaborative to invite Council staff to their meetings and community activities as a way to continue our partnerships.

Yen then discussed the Council’s membership.

COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

- Chair (Governor or Designee)
- 2 Community Members
- Commission on African American Affairs
- Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs
- Commission on Hispanic Affairs
- Governor's Office on Indian Affairs (delegated to the American Indian Health Commission)
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (K-12 education)
- Department of Social and Health Services
- Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board
- Department of Children, Youth, and Families
- State Board of Health
- Department of Health
- Health Care Authority
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Ecology



GOVERNOR'S INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HEALTH DISPARITIES

Yen said that the goal in bringing together representatives from different state agencies and partners is to have diverse perspectives represented that can support the Council by connecting with what's happening across systems. This enables different agencies to see what other agencies are doing and what impacts different communities are experiencing.

In addition to our agency members, Yen said, other staff from state agencies are invited to join the Council's public meetings. There are two community members seated on the Council. Key partners are also invited to collaborate with the Council, although they are not formal Council members. These groups include:

- Environmental Justice Council
- LGBTQ Commission
- Women's Commission
- Office of Equity
- Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee.
- Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment
- Economic Justice Alliance

Yen and her colleagues then posted links into the Chat for folks who would like to get involved with the Council or its key partners (see Resources Shared below).

Questions from the Community

Q: Do you work with Washington Economic Justice Alliance?

A: Yes, we do! One thing our team is trying to do is strengthen partnerships with groups such as the Economic Justice Alliance. They have been kind to reach out to us for that partnership as well, so it feels mutual. We also seem to have a lot of overlap with the agencies that are represented and working with both of our groups. We're feeling really good about that connection.

Q: Do you have a partnership with organizations with a focus on disability?

A: One of our key partners is the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment. We also have other governmental agencies on the Council that serve people with disabilities in one way or another. We would welcome participation and partnership from other organizations. Sign up for our newsletter so that you can access meeting information and agendas. We'd love to have you join us.

Resources Shared

Volunteer Opportunity: We would love to welcome more of you all into our Disability-Access and Functional Needs (DAFN) workgroup! To learn more, please reach out to me (Liz.Clement@doh.wa.gov), Todd Holloway, or any of our other valued and beloved workgroup members or DOH staff you might know.

Subscribe to the Health Disparities Council's email list & connect with the team:

healthequity@sboh.wa.gov

Check out the Health Disparities Council's website: [Home | Health Equity](#)

Environmental Justice Council

Sierra Rotakhina shared an overview of the Environmental Justice Council (EJC), which serves as a forum for environmental justice concerns and priorities that Tribes and communities want to elevate to the state. Established under the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, the Council provides recommendations to the Governor, legislature, and state agencies concerning environmental justice, including amplifying what communities and Tribes are saying about funding priorities and how the work should be done.

The Council consists of 16 members appointed by the Governor. Council membership includes seats for community representatives, a youth community representative, environmental justice practitioners, Tribes, labor, and business. Sierra noted that the Council is currently talking about how to transform how it's doing its work, so that meetings can be more centered in elevating community concerns that have been heard and problem solving.

"We'd love you all to help and contribute your wisdom as to how the Council could better serve you," she said. She also reiterated that staff is always happy to meet with people. "Our community representatives on the council will often hold small listening sessions in their communities, so that

they can hear from community and then elevate that at the Council meetings. We also try to do at least one in-person meeting a year that is much more of a dialogue with community than a business meeting.” Sierra also noted that the public comment period at the Council’s business meetings is a good way to elevate issues and inform the Council’s work.

Sierra provided a link for those who are interested in being considered for an appointment to serve on the Council, which currently has several vacancies, along with a link for information on upcoming meetings.

Environmental Justice Grants

Kayla Stewart, Environmental Justice Grants Program Manager at DOH, provided an update.

- For the 2025 to 2027 biennium, the Department of Health was provided \$4 million through a budget provision to fund HEAL capacity grants to support tribal and community engagement and HEAL activities.
- For our community competitive grants, we have awarded a total of \$1.4 million to six incredible community-based organizations. Grant awards of up to \$100,000 were distributed to four community organizations. Additionally, two community organizations were awarded \$500,000 pass-through grants—Front and Centered and the Washington State Coalition of African Community Leaders. These organizations have designed their own Request for Applications (RFAs) to further support smaller organizations across the state. **The RFAs for both organizations are currently open and accepting applications.**
- For our tribal non-competitive grants, 22 tribes have expressed interest and or an intent to apply for the funds. Five grants are fully executed, with seven currently in process.
- Information on the tribal grant program was shared at the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) winter convention in early February, and we are currently working to connect with tribes from whom we have not yet heard. **The application remains open for this grant until June 2026**, after which remaining funds will be redistributed to tribes with executed agreements to further support their projects.

Resources Shared

Environmental Justice Council:

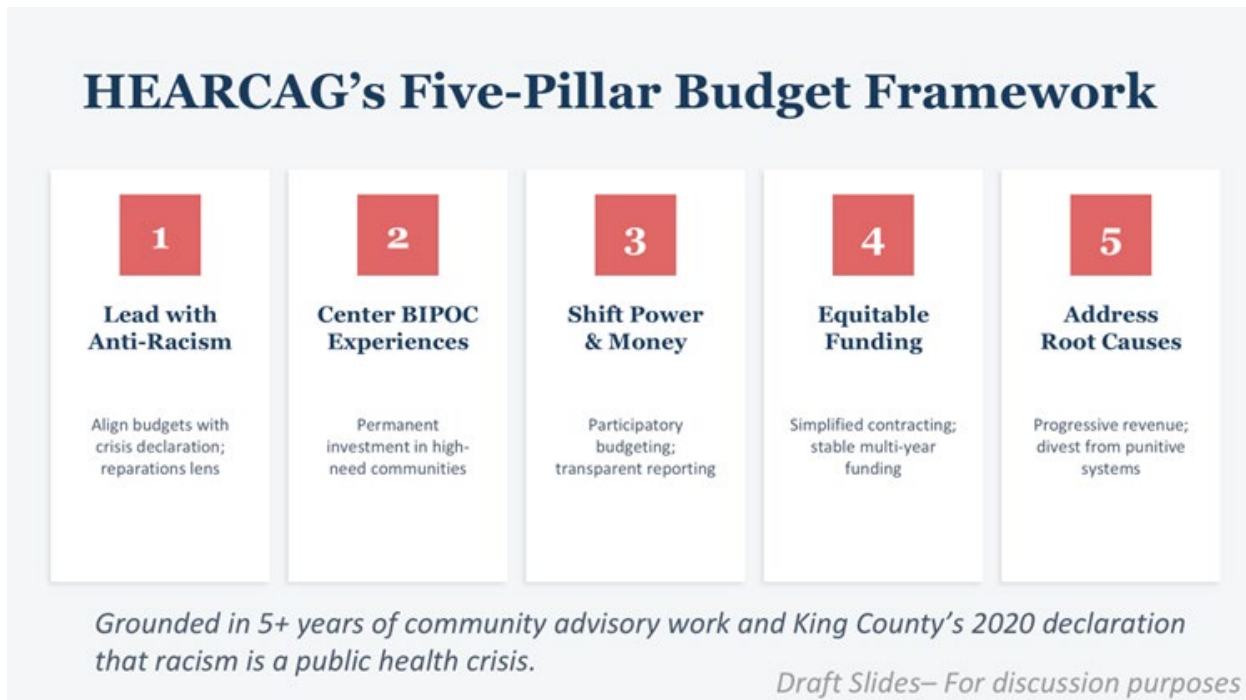
- Upcoming meetings: <https://waportal.org/partners/environmental-justice-council/environmental-justice-council-meetings>
- Apply to participate in the EJ Council: <https://governor.wa.gov/boards-commissions/board-commission-profiles/Environmental%20Justice%20Council>
- Connect or learn more about the Environmental Justice Council by emailing Sierra at sierra.rotakhina@ejc.wa.gov

- For more information on passthrough grant opportunities, please contact: kayla.stewart@doh.wa.gov

PHSKC Health Equity Anti-Racism Community Advisory Group (HEARCAG)

Tiara Ranson and Jennell Hicks introduced the Health Equity Anti-Racism Community Advisory Group (HEARCAG), which works to advance health equity and anti-racism efforts within Public Health in Seattle and King County. A collaboration among 28 organizations (and growing!), HEARCAG focuses on community-informed approaches to addressing inequities and elevating lived experiences in decision-making processes. “We advocate for equitable opportunity for health and well-being,” Tiara said, “making sure that communities—and specifically Black, Brown, and Indigenous folks—are at the forefront of those conversations.”

Tiara said that the policy committee has focused on three priorities this year: (1) food access and justice; (2) preserving gender-affirming care and women’s rights to health; and (3) budget and community power. She offered a snapshot of the current game plan for each of these areas and noted that their work is grounded in the values of dignity, choice, autonomy, and security. HEARCAG is not a decision-making body, she said, but serve an advisory role in helping to reimagine how the county spends its funds— spending more on health, community development, and human services and less in the criminal legal system. She shared HEARCAG’s Five-Pillar Budget Framework:



Tiara discussed the impact that HEARCAG has had in weighing in on public policy, including the annual budget, the community health improvement plan, workforce development, and contracting procedures. “Another important piece is the dynamic of holding community-led conversations and inviting elected officials to come and participate,” she said. “In those conversations, we get the ability to act in different ways. There might be business conversations, and there might be a lot of strategic planning, but you can't do the planning without being fueled—and that means collective power and relationship building, or as I like to call it, relational medicine.”

Tiara and Jennell expressed the belief that the Community Collaborative focused on many of the same issues and share similar dynamics and priorities. Collaborative members were invited to learn more about HEARCAG, attend meetings, and connect with organizers to get involved. “In a similar way as this group is amazing and has served,” Tiara said, “we hope to continue creating and making it known that we need collective power in order to have an anti-racist and inclusive future.”

Questions from the Community

Q: Are there representatives from Eastern Washington on this, or is there something similar to this in eastern Washington?

A: We just work in King County—but if people in Eastern Washington are interested in getting something like this going, we would be happy to share our experience. We are always happy to partner. If we build a broader coalition, we can send a more powerful message to legislators from across the state.

Resources Shared

Health Equity and Anti-Racism Community Advisory Group: [Health Equity and Anti-Racism Community Advisory Group - King County, Washington](#)

Upcoming Events

Rooted in Care: Honoring the Black Maternal Health Experience. **Saturday, April 11**, 3:00 PM 7:00 PM, Ranier Arts Center. Learn More: <https://www.coopartnerships.org/community-events/2026/4/11/rooted-in-care-honoring-the-black-maternal-health-experience>

Black Earth Day: Planting Seeds of Resilience in Our Community. **Saturday, April 18th**, 10 AM to 3 PM at the Martin Luther King Jr. Family Outreach Center in Spokane. Learn more: <https://www.carlmaxeycenter.org/blackearthday>

Black & Indigenous Birth Justice Collaborative Film Festival: A day of film, story, and conversation exploring the work of community partners advancing birth justice across Washington. **April 29**, 1:00 PM Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center. Learn more: <https://byoriginhaus.my.canva.site/black-indigenous-birth-justice-collaborative-film-festival>

Washington Poison Center. You are all invited to our 70th Anniversary event in Seattle on Thursday, **May 7th!!** And in Spokane on Thursday, September 24th. Learn more: <https://www.wapc.org/70th/>

5th Annual "Every Month is Black History Month" Community Health & Resource Fair, Saturday, April 18, 2026, from 10 AM to 2 PM at the Northwest African American Museum. Learn more: https://www.instagram.com/p/DW5WTyzDF_6/

Gratitude and Close

The meeting closed with reflections on the impact of the Community Collaborative and appreciation for the relationships built over time. DOH staff and community members acknowledged the significance of the space in fostering trust, shared learning, and meaningful engagement across the state.

Participants were encouraged to attend the final Community Collaborative meeting on May 8, where there will be an opportunity to reflect on the work accomplished, share feedback, and help shape how community voice continues to inform DOH efforts moving forward.

Closing Quote

“Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter will always have the best part of the story”
(African proverb)