



2021 Legislative Agenda

The Association of Washington Health Plans (AWHP) is comprised of health plans operating in Washington state across all markets and provide health coverage for over 6 million Washington consumers. Our legislative agenda is based on shared priorities identified by member plans. These priorities guide AWHP's engagement in policy and budget discussions with legislators, the executive branch and other stakeholders.

AWHP's 2021 legislative agenda is outlined below:

- **Taxes & Revenue:** Funding sources must be equitable, broad-based, efficient, and sustainable.
- **Telehealth:** Legislation must maintain flexibility and promote affordability while ensuring access and efficiency for both consumers and providers.
- **Medicaid & the Safety Net:** Legislation must maintain the same level of benefits and reimbursement rates and protect optional benefits as well.

Public Option & Market Stability: Legislation must maintain the stability of our current market without disrupting coverage options for the individuals and employers.

AWHP and its member plans look forward to working toward a stronger health care system in the 2021 session.

Contact: Chris Bandoli, Executive Director **Email:** chris@wahealthcareplans.org **Cell:** 206.369.2299
www.wahealthcareplans.org



AWHP Tax & Revenue Principles

Purpose: The following principles will guide the Association of Washington Healthcare Plans (AWHP) in evaluation of proposed tax and revenue legislation impacting health plans.

Principles: The legislation must...

- **Be additive** to a fully funded safety net, including Medicaid
- **Be equitable** amongst health plans regardless of corporate structure, licensure type, and line of business
- **Be broad-based** within the broader health care industry
- **Be efficient** for health plans to implement and administer
- **Be a sustainable** revenue source, be at least partially **allocated** toward programs that increase health care affordability and/or access to health care, and **avoid** raising costs for consumers



Telehealth

AWHP strongly supports the use of innovative technologies to expand access to care when and where people need it. Health plans are leading efforts to realize the promise of telehealth to improve healthcare access,¹ bend the cost curve² and promote positive health outcomes.³

AWHP Supports

- **Telehealth Incorporated in Network Access:** Create a mechanism to incorporate care delivered via telemedicine and through telehealth contracts in network adequacy requirements measuring access.
- **Access to Care through Audio-Only Technology as a Reimbursable Service with Appropriate Guardrails:** Include audio-only visits in the definition of telemedicine with guardrails to prevent fraud, waste and abuse and ensure that reimbursement is based on resources and time.

Principles

- **Maintain Flexibility and Promote Affordability:** Specific coverage and reimbursement needs in the long term may be different than responding to a public health crisis, so policies should strive for appropriate flexibility without strict reimbursement requirements. This helps plans tailor reimbursement strategies to establish high quality, cost-effective provider networks and keep premiums stable year-to-year.
- **Make Consumer Trust Paramount:** Telehealth policies must assure patient privacy and information security that aligns with HIPAA and includes guardrails to ensure consumer protection against fraud and abuse. In addition, we support:
 - Establishing processes that verify a patient's identity when video is not available.
 - Appropriate use of telehealth modalities when standards of care can be maintained.
- **Ensure Access and Efficiency:** Improved access to care for patients and increased efficiency for providers and plans should be an underlying goal of all telehealth policies. We support the efforts to remove arbitrary restrictions, such as geographic and originating site requirement and obstacles to multi-state licensure for providers.
- **Rely on Telehealth Collaborative:** Major changes should be properly vetted from all corners of the health care industry through the Telehealth Collaborative to solicit and incorporate broad stakeholder input on important policy changes.

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¹ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05089>

² [https://www.ajemjournal.com/article/S0735-6757\(18\)30653-3/fulltext](https://www.ajemjournal.com/article/S0735-6757(18)30653-3/fulltext)

³ <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/cer-216-telehealth-final-report.pdf>



Protect Medicaid & the Safety Net

AWHP urges lawmakers to protect the safety net to promote and support the health of all Washingtonians

- **Protect Medicaid:** We must maintain the same level of benefits and reimbursement rates for providers to ensure access to robust care for our Medicaid beneficiaries, before seeking revenue for new health care programs. Protect optional benefits like adult dental, maternity supports, and interpreter services. Health care is a key component to our ability to recover both physically and economically from the current global pandemic.
- **Invest in the safety net:** People need more than access to health care to be healthy, particularly our most vulnerable community members. We must maintain and invest in programs that protect individuals and families including TANF, housing services and supports and food benefits.
- **Balanced approach to new revenue:** As the state explores new revenue sources to ensure adequate funding for safety net programs, AWHP urges a balanced approach that protects access to safety net programs while preventing harm to other consumers who receive health care coverage outside of Medicaid. Revenue assessed from health care must:
 - Be **equitable** amongst health plans regardless of corporate structure, licensure type and line of business.
 - Be **broad-based** within the broader health care industry.
 - Be **efficient** for health plans to implement and administer.
 - Be a **sustainable** revenue source, at least partially **allocated** toward programs that increase health care affordability and/or access to healthcare while **avoiding increased costs for consumers**.



Public Option & Market Stability

Stabilize and strengthen the health insurance market where over 6 million Washingtonians obtain coverage and improve consumer affordability

- **Maintain** stability of current market. In recent years individual market premiums on average have remained stable or decreased. The Legislature adopted many of the central provisions of the Affordable Care Act into state law. The Cascade Care law will launch in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic has added thousands of consumers to the individual and Medicaid markets. Now is not the time to pass disruptive new programs or regulations.
- **Protect** affordability for consumers by supporting broad-based funding approaches for premium subsidy wraps and opposing taxes that increase the cost of health care coverage. Explore options to increase affordability of Cascade Care products.
- **Oppose** measures that will disrupt individual and small group coverage options and result in higher costs such as merging markets and mandating carrier participation in Exchange/Cascade Care.
- **Support** an extension by removing/extending the sunset of WSHIP non-Medicare plans to provide stability to the individual market and continue coverage of high-risk individuals.
- **Support** broader mechanisms to maintain market stability through obtaining federal 1332 waivers & implementing a reinsurance program to reduce premium and maintaining expanded Medicaid enrollment.

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