Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

Successes and Priorities

We are Washington state's largest agency, and its human services umbrella agency. We deliver critical services to 1 in 4 Washingtonians – or more than 2 million people each year. Our work cannot be done alone. Our success relies on collaboration with those we serve, tribal governments, our community partners and advocates. We have five direct-service areas and three areas dedicated to supporting the entire agency's operations. Our nearly 17,000 compassionate staff members work in communities all over the state, and we are bound together by a single mission: To transform lives.

Here are some of our recent successes and priorities during the past year.

Serving our communities

Addressing challenges in today's work environment: We're improving access to services with a virtual case management center, implementing strategies to address electronic benefit transfer card skimming impacts and reducing the backlog of documents.

Visiting Indian Country: Secretary Jilma Meneses has traveled the state and met with nearly half of Washington's federally recognized tribes, and more visits are planned this year. We have also worked with partners to establish the Social Services Committee on the Governor-Tribal Leader Social Services Council.

Supporting immigrants and refugees: Operation Allies Welcome allowed us to be a national leader in helping welcome Afghans to our state, and we furthered our commitment to our communities with our Washington Ukrainian Task Force. We also disbursed the third round of the Washington COVID-19 Immigrant Relief Funds, which received more than 115,000 applications and provided more than $306 million to our immigrant communities.

Helping people stay in their communities for care: We assisted more than 340 clients from state psychiatric hospitals and 3,000 from skilled nursing facilities to transition into their communities. We also diverted nearly 500 more clients from state psychiatric hospitals by identifying long-term care services that allowed them to remain in their communities, and handled 8,200 referrals from acute hospitals.

Creating an Office of Justice and Civil Rights: This new office is dedicated to handling all discrimination complaints and is restructuring operations and staff development, implementing a compliance program, expanding community engagement and making data-driven management decisions.

Providing personal protective equipment: We have delivered more than one million pieces of PPE to individual providers to help prevent exposure to COVID-19.

Adding new clients and increasing our services: We enrolled more than 2,200 new clients with developmental disabilities on Home and Community Based Services Waivers and increased service options in the community. We are on track to increase by 32% our use of specialized habilitation, assistive technology and community engagement for our clients with developmental disabilities. We assisted nearly 18,000 people to access needed health care and long-term services and supports to live in their setting of choice. In addition, we reduced the number of Division of Vocational Rehabilitation customers on the waitlist for services from 2,716 in SFY 2021 to 1,228 in SFY 2022, a drop of 55 percent.

Washington State Department of Social & Health Services

Transforming lives

Increasing case management ratios: We worked with Gov. Jay Inslee's office, the Legislature and stakeholders to increase funding and improve case management ratios from 79.2 clients per case manager to 68.5 clients per case manager for adults and seniors in need of long-term care. This improves responsiveness to clients, quality of care and service planning as well as the timeliness of assessments for individuals.

Improving website accessibility: We have improved language access to people who speak a language other than English through dedicated translation pages. Using only human translations and working with our Office of Equity, Diversity, Access and Inclusion, we aim to provide more easily accessible content in more languages.

Working to reduce poverty: As part of the Governor's Subcabinet on Intergenerational Poverty, we are working with local, state and federal partners and tribal governments to focus on people and communities historically excluded from social and economic well-being in policy and program development while we implement the state's 10-Year Plan to Dismantle Poverty.

Expanding access to vital services: In addition to continuing emergency allotments through March 2023 to families receiving Basic Food benefits, we expanded EBT issuances to 17 of 26 tribal outstations, implemented expanded state-funded benefits to victims of human trafficking, and wrapped up distribution of our third round of Pandemic EBT – federal food benefits for children who had limited meals at their school or child care centers due to the pandemic.

Moving toward electronic health records: We are taking steps to implement an electronic health record system. Planning is underway to include pre-readiness work and a funding request from the Washington State Legislature.

Unifying records: Our facilities are in the process of finalizing the use of myUnity, a software that automates admissions, referrals and other health information for our clients with developmental disabilities.

Supporting One Washington: We are partnering with the Office of Financial Management and other state agencies to implement a new financial system to modernize the state's essential administrative functions.

Replacing ACES: As part of the state's Health and Human Services Enterprise Coalition, we are implementing an Integrated Eligibility and Enrollment system to replace our aging ACES benefits eligibility system with a more modern IT system that is easier for clients and employees.

Building stronger relationships with advocates: We gathered a group of community stakeholders, leaders and staff – called Advocates for Access – to better understand customers' experiences and address long wait times in our call centers. We are collaborating with this group to ensure that we provide timely services and benefits.

Planning for the WA Cares Fund: We engaged community stakeholders and state agencies to plan for benefit implementation and prepare Washingtonians for premium collection and new exemptions in 2023. We continue to support the Long-Term Services and Supports Trust Commission in developing recommendations to successfully implement the program.

Battling climate change: We reduced our 2020 greenhouse gas emissions from 33,000 metric tons to 17,000 which is 42% below our 2030 goal. In addition, we secured grant funding for electric vehicle charging stations at our owned facilities.

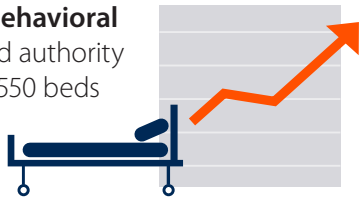
Implementing our first rate-setting board: We supported the implementation of the first ever rate-setting board using recommendations and public testimony from direct care workers and experts. The increases were included in the state's 2023-25 operating budget and will benefit 60,000 workers.

Protecting vulnerable adults: We investigated nearly 80,000 quality of care complaints and allegations of abuse, neglect, exploitation, financial exploitation and improper use of restraints.

Licensing more providers: We licensed 509 new residential providers resulting in an increase of 3,446 available beds for the growing population of individuals with disabilities or people who are in need of long-term care supports due to aging.

Washington State Department of Social & Health Services
Transforming lives

Building the facilities we need



Expanding facilities for behavioral health clients: We received authority and funding to add nearly 550 beds by 2028 across various locations throughout the state.

Increasing highly skilled nursing options: We are also in the planning stages to build a new skilled nursing facility at Fircrest School in Shoreline for our clients with developmental disabilities. We submitted a master development plan and selected a nonprofit partner to provide financing and coordinate design, construction and facility operations.

Preparing for a new forensic hospital: We are building a new 350-bed forensic hospital on the Western State Hospital campus for competency restoration patients. Planning is in high gear and the hospital is slated to open in 2027.

Telling our story

Evolving our brand: We launched a project to update our mission, vision, values and logo in partnership with staff and community input.

Using strategic eBooks: We introduced a new way of presenting strategic plans by creating visual eBooks that tell the story of each administration's goals and objectives.

Connecting with offices and facilities: Secretary Meneses visited numerous sites during the past year including Eastern State Hospital, Lakeland Village, Western State Hospital, Olympia Community Services Office, the Special Commitment Center and the Vancouver Division of Vocational Rehabilitation office as part of meeting staff throughout the state.

Budgeting for the future: Our Central Budget Office developed a metric-based scoring process to rank policy budget decision package requests for our 2023-25 budget submittal. The scoring process considers how well each request aligned with our state's priorities.

Staying strategic with social media: We increased the number of followers on social media by 8% on Twitter and 20% on Facebook, and bolstered content strategy to expand reach on Instagram.

Washington State Department of Social & Health Services

Transforming lives

Building the staff we need

Ensuring salary equity: We are working to propose recommendations for increasing the base salaries of critical job classes across the agency.

Filling leadership positions: We are hiring strategic leaders who will collaborate and tackle challenges as our need for services continues to rise.

Hiring direct care staff: As we build new facilities to add bed capacity for our behavioral health patients, we plan to hire at least 1,500 more direct care staff during the next few years.

Establishing a Proactive Equity and Anti-Racism Team: Our Community-Agency PEAR Team is creating a strategic plan, onboarding consultants and connecting their work with the state Office of Equity's expectations.

DSHS PEAR TEAM
Proactive Equity Anti-Racism

Realigning information technology: Our IT is now organized under a single administration and led by an Assistant Secretary / Chief Technology Innovation Officer.

Producing career videos: We are creating video stories of our staff for recruitment efforts.

Becoming an employer of choice: We have launched an initiative for recruiting, hiring and workforce planning to make our agency an employer of choice.

Creating an inclusive workplace through innovative trainings: We are developing an online introductory course on gender identity that will include personal video stories from our staff.

Training a long-term care workforce: We are partnering with the University of Washington, Department of Health, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and Everett High School to bring more nurses, nursing assistants and high school students into the long-term care workforce.

Localizing recruitment efforts: Our residential facilities that provide support for people with developmental disabilities have created hiring centers to increase on-boarding of new staff.

Elevating emergency management: We are providing first-time training to executive leaders on emergency management and implementing tabletop exercises on actions needed in response to an emergency.

Supporting all leaders: We expanded our Leadership Summit to include all front-line managers. A recording of the program, which includes nationally recognized speakers such as Dr. Cornel West, is available for all staff.

Supporting a modern workplace

Completing the SILAS project: We are implementing a new System for Integrated Leave, Attendance and Scheduling which will help track staff time, attendance and scheduling more effectively than our current system.

Implementing a safety dashboard: We launched a new Safety and Injury Dashboard to monitor, track and reduce workplace injuries.

Conducting cyber security audits: Our Information Technology auditors reviewed our IT controls and gave recommendations to better prepare us to defend against cyberattacks.

Standardizing incident reports: We are creating a common incident reporting system that incorporates all administrations into a streamlined notification process.

Holding ourselves accountable: Our auditor established a new corrective action plan to be used consistently across the agency, including milestones and the ability to report more information when tracking internal audits. We also implemented first-time performance evaluations for all agency executive leaders and are requiring annual performance goals.

Washington State Department of Social & Health Services
Transforming lives