

March 8, 2023

Honorable Chair Representative Timm Ormsby
Washington State House of Representatives Appropriations Committee
315 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia WA 98504

Honorable Vice Chair Steve Bergquist
Washington State House of Representatives Appropriations Committee
438B Legislative Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

Honorable Vice Chair Mia Gregerson
328 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

Honorable Vice Chair Representative Nicole Macri
Washington State House of Representatives Appropriations Committee
366 John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia WA 98504-0600

Honorable Ranking Member Drew Stokesbary
425A Legislative Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504

Re: Support for Immigrant Access to Health Care in the Budget

Dear Chair Ormsby, Vice Chair Bergquist, Vice Chair Gregerson, Vice Chair Macri, Ranking Member Stokesbary, and Members of the Appropriation Committee:

The 163 undersigned organizations respectfully request that the Legislature include in the biennial budget full funding for the Medicaid-equivalent health coverage program and ongoing Cascade Care financial assistance for Washingtonians currently excluded from affordable health coverage due to federal immigration status restrictions.

Action is needed now to close coverage equity gaps. Everyone should have access to medical care. Health coverage is essential to improving health outcomes. However, in Washington one in four people without health insurance are undocumented. This is an issue of equity and presents a significant opportunity to address disparities in health outcomes. According to 2017 [OFM estimates](#) of undocumented immigrants in Washington, 46% are of Hispanic origin and 37% are of Asian and/or Pacific Islander origin, while only 11.8% are non-Hispanic white. The pandemic underscored the human cost of discriminatory policies, with immigrants and people of color disproportionately both hospitalized for and dying from COVID-19 – exacerbated by systemic exclusion from the health care safety net. The Legislature has the power to fix that and has made a commitment to do so.

The state is ready for change. Last spring, we applauded the Legislature's decisions to: (1)

provide administrative funding in the supplemental budget to create a Medicaid equivalent program for those under 138% of the federal poverty line, irrespective of immigration status; and (2) direct the Health Benefit Exchange (HBE) to pursue a 1332 waiver to allow all Washingtonians the ability to purchase health coverage on Healthplanfinder. The Health Care Authority and HBE have also started implementation and are preparing to begin both programs in January 2024, contingent upon sufficient funding levels. In a ground-breaking step, CMS approved [HBE's 1332 waiver request](#) to allow all immigrants to access coverage through WA Healthplanfinder, which also paves the way for state Cascade Care premium assistance to begin for all Washington residents. Communities across the state now eagerly anticipate affordable health coverage under both programs starting in January 2024.

Adequate funding will be critical. To ensure the programs are able to launch in January 2024 and provide meaningful affordability assistance it is essential the budget include:

- Full ongoing funding for the Medical equivalent program for those up to 138% FPL, irrespective of immigration status;
- Ongoing funding for Cascade Care premium assistance for those up to 250% FPL - at minimum the current appropriation of \$55M /year plus an additional \$5M of premium assistance for those ineligible for federal premium subsidies;
- An ongoing \$3M of funds for outreach and enrollment that is community-led and linguistically appropriate; and
- One-time funding to allow agencies to study outstanding equity gaps in the programs.

We appreciate that the Governor's Budget highlighted these programs and his office has been supportive of this policy, however the funding provided in the Governor's budget is insufficient to allow the programs to successfully launch by January 2024. Funding to support the 1332 program was included in the Governor's Budget but additional funding is needed to advance equity and the funding must be made ongoing. Further, the funding for the Medicaid-equivalent program was less than what the Legislature included in the 2022 budget's out-year projections and significantly below what is projected to be needed. While OFM estimated 33,000 Washingtonians would be eligible for the Medicaid-equivalent, now HCA believes 73,000 people may qualify for that program. The experience of other states that have expanded access to health coverage to undocumented adults suggests the need for adequate funding and flexibility as we expand coverage for a population that has been relegated to the shadows by ongoing marginalization that may obscure need.

Undocumented Washingtonians strengthen our state. Almost 200,000 citizens reside with an undocumented family member in our state. Undocumented immigrants in Washington paid an estimated \$371 million in [state and local taxes](#) in 2019. Yet many immigrants go without critical health care services because they have no way to obtain affordable health coverage. Washington is home to an estimated 105,000 uninsured immigrants who are integral members of our communities but who today are ineligible for Medicaid or Exchange coverage because of their immigration status. This means that thousands of immigrants go without needed care or delay care until it becomes an emergency, which drives up health system costs. Meaningful health care access for all Washingtonians will make our state healthier and our economy more robust.

Washington is poised to join other leading states in improving health affordability and access regardless of citizenship status. While Illinois, California, Colorado, and Oregon have already taken steps to cover some undocumented adults, Washington's 1332 waiver is the first in the nation to provide access to all state residents to our health coverage marketplace, regardless of immigration status. Now the Legislature must keep its promise to Washingtonians and fully fund both 2024 programs so that meaningful affordability assistance accompanies the waiver.

This session, we urge budget writers to include full funding for the Medicaid equivalent program and ongoing funding to make Exchange access affordable in the final budget to ensure that all Washingtonians have access to the coverage and care they need.

Signed,

ACLU of Washington
Adult Family Home Council
Afghan Health Initiative
African Leaders Health Board
Alimentando al Pueblo
Alliance for Gun Responsibility
Allison Carney Consulting
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
Amerigroup Washington
Arcora Foundation
Asia Pacific Cultural Center
Asian Counseling and Referral Service
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance Seattle Chapter
Asian Pacific Islander Coalition - South Puget Sound
Asian Pacific Islander Coalition of Yakima
Asian Pacific Islander Coalition Spokane
Balance Our Tax Code
Bella Smiles for Developmental Disabilities
BIPOC ED Coalition
Birchwood Food Desert Fighters
Building Changes
CAFE: Community for the Advancement of Family Education
Cedar River Clinics
Center for Chronic Illness
Center for MultiCultural Health
Central Washington Justice For Our Neighbors
Children's Alliance
Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program
Columbia Legal Services
Communities In Schools of Benton-Franklin
Community Health Plan of WA, Community Health Network of WA
Community Visions
Confluence Health
Congoese Integration Network
Connecting Community
Coordinated Care
Economic Opportunity Institute
El Centro de la Raza
Empire Health Foundation
Ethiopian Community in Seattle
Faith Action Network
Families USA
Firelands Workers Action/Acción de Trabajadores
Foundation for Healthy Generations
Fuse Washington
Global Women Community SPC

Greater Spokane Progress
Health Analytics & Visualizations
Health Care For All - WA
Health Care Is a Human Right WA
Health Coalition for Children and Youth
Health Equity Circle
Healthy House Within A MATCH Coalition
Hispanic Business Professional Association
Hispanic Disability Support SWWA (Pasitos Gigantes)
Hopelink
Human Right Protection & Global Peace
If/When/How
Indian American community services
Indivisible Skagit
InterIm CDA
International Community Health Services
Iraqi Arab Health Board
Iraqi Community Center of WA
Islamic Civic Engagement Project
Jefferson County Immigrant Rights Advocates
Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW
Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle
Kavana Cooperative
King County Promotores Network (KCPN)
Kitsap Immigrants Assistance Center
La Resistencia
Latino Center for Health
Latino Civic Alliance
Latino Community Fund of Washington
Latinos En Spokane
Latinos Promoting Good Health
Latinx Health Board
Legal Voice
Malawi Seattle Association
Manzanita House
MAPS-AMEN (American Muslim Empowerment Network)
Metropolitan Seattle Sickle Cell Task Force
Molina Healthcare Inc.
Mother Africa
Mt. Baker Planned Parenthood
Mujeres in Action (MiA)
MultiCare Health System
Muslims for Community Action and Support (MCAS)
Mutual Aid Solidarity/Neighbors in Action
NAMI WA
National Immigration Law Center
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
North Seattle Progressives
Northwest Abortion Access Fund
Northwest Harvest
Northwest Health Law Advocates (NoHLA)
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Northwest Progressive Institute
OneAmerica

Pacific County Immigrant Support
Pacific Islander Community Association of Washington
Pacific Islander Health Alliance NW
Pacific Islander Health Board of Washington
Para Los Niños de Highline
Partners for Our Children
Patient Coalition of Washington
Peace and Justice Action League of Spokane
Pioneer United Methodist Church
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Greater Washington and North Idaho
Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates
Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho
Pro-Choice Washington
Public Health Solutions
Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action
Racial Equity and Social Justice Coalition of the Tri-Cities
Raíz of Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho
Refugee & Immigrant Services NW
Refugee Women's Alliance
Rooted in Vibrant Communities Seattle
Seattle Children's
Seattle Indivisible
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Somali Health Board
South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center
South Sudan Kuku Association of North America (SSKANA)
Spokane Community Against Racism
Spokane Immigrant Rights Coalition
St. Paul's/Resurrección Episcopal Churches
Statewide Poverty Action Network
Strengthening Sanctuary Alliance
Tacoma Pierce County Health Department
UFCW 3000
United Way of King County
University of Washington
UTOPIA WA
Villa Comunitaria
WA Community Alliance
WA Partners for Social Change
WA State Alliance for Retired Americans
Wallingford Indivisible
Washington Academy of Family Physicians
Washington Association for Community Health
Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Washington Community Action Network
Washington Healthcare Access Alliance
Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network
Washington Multicultural Services Link
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Washington Poor People's Campaign
Washington State Budget and Policy Center
Washington State Catholic Conference
Washington State Hospital Association
Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Washington State Medical Association
Washington State Public Health Association
Wenatchee for Immigrant Justice
Whatcom Waves
White Center Community Development Association
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
WithinReach
Working Families Party
Yakima Immigrant Response Network