

8 November 2024

Governor Jay Inslee
c/o Senior Policy Advisor Molly Voris
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Director Pat Sullivan
Office of Financial Management
P.O. Box 43113
Olympia, WA 98504-3113

via electronic mail

Re: 59 Organizations Request Governor's Budget Investment In Immigrant Health Equity

Dear Governor Inslee, Director Sullivan, and Senior Policy Advisor Voris:

The undersigned 59 organizations respectfully request that the Governor's final budget prioritize funding for health coverage for immigrant communities in the 2025-2027 biennium. We thank you for your leadership over the years and ask that you secure your legacy as a champion for equitable access to health coverage for all Washingtonians with further investment in the immigrant communities who are essential to the strength of our state. **As you know, many Washingtonians go without essential health care because they are structurally excluded from affordable health coverage today.**

With your leadership, Washington took historic steps this year to expand health access by both launching Apple Health Expansion, a Medicaid-like program for adults with incomes up to 138% FPL, who are excluded from federal support, and opening Washington Healthplanfinder to all Washingtonians. Current funding has allowed over 12,000 low-income adults to access Apple Health and for over 2,000 to purchase qualified health plans for the first time. However, these individuals are only a small fraction of the immigrant communities in Washington who are income-eligible for our new state programs; the vast majority of low-income Washington immigrant adults continue to suffer from a lack of sufficient health coverage.

To ensure these programs provide meaningful affordability assistance, we ask that the Governor's 2025-2027 biennial budget include the following:

(1) Programmatic and operational funds to expand the Apple Health Expansion program for eligible adults with income up to 138% of the federal poverty line who are ineligible for other federally subsidized health care programs. While Washington made significant advances this year, over 8,000 eligible individuals have been denied as of 20 September due solely to capped funds. Additionally, between October 2023 and June 2024, over 18,000 individuals entered their information into Healthplanfinder and appeared to be eligible for AHE. However, less than 20 percent of those individuals were able to secure a spot in the program. OFM estimates over 35,000 Washingtonians are eligible, but HCA reports current funding only provides coverage to 12,000 – about 1 in 3 eligible individuals. We appreciate HCA's request for additional AHE funding as their second priority of 53 requests; however, the proposed additional 4,000 spaces in HCA's decision package request for 2025 will cover fewer than half of those who have *already* been denied due to the cap. Our top priority is for the Governor's budget to demonstrate a stronger commitment to health equity with adequate AHE funding to cover more eligible Washingtonians and at minimum accept the HCA's decision package request.

Additionally, the Governor's budget can lay the foundation for future advancement with modest investments:

(2) Accountability to communities is essential to addressing disparities.

The Health Care Authority has worked with the Health Benefit Exchange and the Department of Social and Health Services to convene a Temporary Community Engagement Advisory Committee to weigh in on aspects of the new immigrant programs. Given the health disparities and historic marginalization endured by immigrant communities, it is crucial for this committee to transition to a permanent accountability committee that provides meaningful insight into and oversight of both AHE and the newly expanded access to qualified health plans on Washington Healthplanfinder. The Accountability Committee should have the resources to evaluate and improve services provided, network adequacy, and quality measures as well as providing accountability.

(3) Identifying strategies to address remaining equity gaps in affordability on

Washington's state exchange. While 1 in 3 newly eligible Washington immigrants shopped for health coverage on the exchange since the 2023 open enrollment, *fewer than 1 in 20* of those Washingtonians purchased coverage indicating significant premium affordability barriers. While Cascade Care Savings has been critical to overall affordability for Washingtonians and needs to be preserved, its current structure is deeply regressive for immigrants by utilizing a flat cap so an individual with no income or an individual with \$36,000 annual income will receive the same dollar amount. Older adults face more expensive premiums but do not have any additional assistance. Although lawfully present immigrants under the federal 5-year bar and DACA recipients can now access federal premium assistance, cost sharing is almost \$10,000 for an individual in addition to premiums and \$20,000 for a family – this is unworkable for those with the lowest incomes. We request one-time funding for an HBE study exploring the best way to resolve inequities in premium and cost-sharing assistance in the future.

(4) Identifying long-term care needs crucial to health. We remain deeply concerned that Apple Health Expansion does not currently include long-term care as a benefit unlike other Apple Health programs. We continue to advocate for long-term care coverage as part of AHE program in the future. For this budget cycle we ask that the budget include a one-time DSHS study to explore coverage needs for individuals who are currently on the waitlist for the state's existing capped long term care program for undocumented immigrants as well as those eligible for the AHE but presently unable to access long-term care.

Today our first priority is preserving and improving health access through Apple Health Expansion. Even in sobering economic conditions, you have an opportunity to establish the groundwork for addressing unmet needs when finances improve – which they will because we are stronger when we all have the opportunity to thrive. We urge you to use your last Governor's budget to build a lasting legacy for health equity.

Thank you for your previous support of health coverage for immigrant communities. Please embrace this opportunity to ensure that the Governor's budget provides the needed funding to continue Washington's status as a national leader in providing equitable access to health care for every Washingtonian.

Sincerely,

ACLU-WA

AFT Washington

AFT-WA Retirees Chapter

Asian Counseling and Referral Service

Asian & Pacific Islander Coalition of Washington
Better Health Together
Building Changes
Columbia Legal Services
Community Health Plan of Washington
Community Health Network of Washington
Comunidades Sin Fronteras de Washington
Congolese Integration Network
Connecting Community
Economic Opportunity Institute
Empower Next Generations
Equitable Care Coalition
Faith Action Network
Firelands Workers United / *Trabajadores Unidos*
Global Women Community SPC
Healthcare for All – Washington
Healthcare is a Human Right WA
Human Right Protection & Global Peace
Immigrant Resources and Immediate Support
International Community Health Services
Jewish Coalition for Immigrant Justice NW
Joyce L. Sobel Family Resource Center
King County Promotores Network (KCPN)
Kicheko Project
Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center
Latino Community Fund
Latinos en Spokane
Latinos Promoting Good Health
Latinx Health Board
Legal Voice
Mother Africa
Muslims For Community Action And Support
NAMI Washington
Neighborhood Clinic
Neighborhood House
Northwest Kidney Centers

North Seattle Progressives
North Sound Language Equity and Access Planners
Northwest Health Law Advocates (NoHLA)
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Pacific County Immigrant Support
Para Los Niños de Highline
Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates
Project Access Northwest
Sea Mar Community Health Centers
Strengthening Sanctuary Alliance, Thurston County
Villa Comunitaria
Washington Association for Community Health
Washington Community Action Network
Washington Healthcare Access Alliance
Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network (WAISN)
Washington Poor People's Campaign
Washington State Budget and Policy Center
Washington State Community Action Partnership
Washington State Nurses Association (WSNA)
Whatcom Center for Early Learning

cc: Rep. Timm Ormsby, Chair, House Appropriations
Sen. June Robinson, Chair, Senate Ways & Means
Rep. Nicole Macri, Vice Chair, House Appropriations
Rep. Mia Gregerson, Vice Chair, House Appropriations
Rep. Steve Bergquist, Vice Chair, House Appropriations
Sen. Joe Nguyễn, Vice Chair, Senate Ways & Means