



2024 WCAAP Legislative Agenda

Improve children and teens' behavioral health and help for families' financial needs

Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships in a child's first years of life are necessary for establishing lifelong health and development. Challenges to caregiver wellbeing alongside structural inequities such as poverty, housing instability, and food insecurity, threaten foundational early childhood health. Simultaneously, Washington state's children and youth continue to face a mental health crisis; **64% of Washington youth with behavioral health needs are not receiving any form of care.**

Solutions

Fund community health workers and care coordination for kids in primary care.

- The Washington State Legislature invested in the Pediatric CHW workforce through a [2-year grant program](#) led by the Health Care Authority (HCA) beginning in January 2023. The 30-funded clinics (including 7 tribal clinics) have already seen significant impacts in their ability to address the health-related social needs of children ages 0-18 and their families, improve access to behavioral health services, and build trusting, collaborative relationships with families.
- We urge our state legislature and HCA to:
 1. Continue the existing pediatric community health worker workforce (40 CHWs) for 2 years.
 2. Allow for care coordination activities on Apple Health for Kids, which will result in ongoing federal match to sustain and spread this invaluable resource for children and teens via:
 - Adequately reimburse health related social needs screening, postnatal and child/adolescent mental health screening sufficient to provide needed follow up and coordination for children and their families, per Bright Futures standard of care.

Improve child health and school success with daily access to healthy food [HB 2058](#) and [SB 5964](#)

In 2022-2023 one-third of Washington households with children had low or very low food security and nearly three-fourths relied on food assistance ([UW WSU](#)).

Solutions

Provide funding to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide **free school meals to all children and teens** in Washington State K-12 schools.

- Children who eat school meals consume a healthier diet overall than those who do not. ([CDC](#))
- Eating breakfast at school is associated with better attendance and better test scores. ([CDC](#))
- Providing free school meals for all children is a proven way to eliminate barriers and stigma for children to get the food they need for healthy growth and development. ([Hopkins](#))
- The American Academy of Pediatrics supports healthy school meals for all students regardless of income eligibility, to ensure no kids go hungry and to eliminate both barriers and stigma. ([Source](#))



Update Statute Governing WA State Purchasing of Childhood Immunizations [HB 2157](#) and [SB 5982](#)

The current Washington state law that governs our state's purchasing program for childhood immunizations includes a narrow and outdated definition of 'vaccine'. This definition prevents our state from purchasing life-saving immunizations that fall outside that definition.

Solutions

Update the current statute's definition of 'vaccine' to make it more inclusive of current and future immunization products. Proposed updated language for the statute:

- "Vaccine" means ~~((a preparation of killed or attenuated living microorganisms, or fraction thereof, that upon administration stimulates immunity that protects against disease and is))~~ an immunization approved by the Federal Food and Drug Administration as safe and effective and recommended by the advisory committee on immunization practices of the centers for disease control and prevention for administration to children under the age of nineteen years.

Our state's long-standing childhood immunization purchase system has improved health equity, significantly decreased costs to the state and the commercially insured and created meaningful efficiencies for providers and clinics to administer vaccines. As immunizations advance, it is critically important that we preserve the value and impact of our purchasing system with this updated definition.

Prevent Gun Violence [HB 1902](#) and [SB 6004](#)

Firearms continue to be the number one factor in child deaths for the third year in a row ([Source](#).) This is a public health emergency for children and teens, and it is past time that we treat it as one.

Solutions

Pass legislation to require a permit to purchase a firearm. Permit-to-purchase systems ensure that background checks occur before a firearm purchase rather than at the point of sale. This life-saving tool has been proven to reduce firearm-related deaths, curb illegal gun trafficking, and help ensure firearms don't fall into dangerous hands. Additionally, permitting provides an extra layer of safety by involving additional checks in the initial stages of firearm acquisition.