

Lobbyist Report

September 2020



Meetings/Work groups attended

- Telehealth Collaborative
- Monthly WMHCA board meeting
- Met with Senator Darnielle
- Behavioral Health Agency Workshop
- Virtual fundraiser for Rep. Jinkins, Rep. Lovick, Rep. Orwall
- Virtual fundraiser for Candidate April Berg
- Behavioral Health Subcommittee Hearing
- House Public Safety hearing (re: police reform)

Summary for Meeting with Senator Darnielle

We have yet to hit the peak of the mental health crisis - typically it takes 6-9 months for people to go from “we’ve got this” to further uncertainty. We must accept that mental health challenges will affect everyone in one way or another.

*Discussed the ongoing need for telehealth

*There needs to be a police reform and co-responding to events will be a benefit to many people. There also needs to be more access for MH for officers and officers should feel OK with asking for help.

*We should think about bills regarding helping MHC’s have access to care themselves

*The licenses city by city doesn’t work for rural (and most) areas

*WMHCA needs to think about ideas around messaging. Define the importance of mental health, how could we mobilize? We should work with unions and major employers to help them know that help is available. Ads/PSA's etc might be able to be covered by the Health Care Authority.

*We should think of a mental health “Top 10” on how people can help themselves through these times-discussed suicide prevention month

*She suggested we should think of other agencies to partner with including the business lobby groups, Chamber of Commerce, advertising companies, software companies, and others

*She also suggested we make a statement about how we fix the problem, and how behavioral health providers are extremely important in opening our economy.

*Talked about the 1/10 of 1% tax and how we might be able to access some of those funds.

Notes from Telehealth Collaborative

There was a lot of discussion around SB 6061. Any organization can make a training as long as it meets the requirements of the bill. The bill is really broad. We don't have to wait until Jan 1, 2021 to take the training. Our telehealth trainings we have been doing will qualify as long as everyone takes the test.

Meetings Requested

Premera Lobbyists October 1, 2020

Senator Frockt October 7, 2020

General Legislative News

The Primary election results overall ended up in our favor as it looks like the Democrats will be picking up a few more seats. The downside is that we are on the verge of losing some Moderate D's (ones that will vote with the Republicans.) This makes it difficult for any Republican sponsored bills to get through. This can be good and also very bad. For example, an access to broadband bill is typically run every year, led by rural Republicans. It is my hope that with the drastic increase of tele-health, both sides will be able to work together on this very important issue.

The General election is soon approaching and temperatures are high on both sides. It is likely that Governor Inslee will prevail, with Congressman Denny Heck winning the Lt. Governor's race. There is still a lot of uncertainty on how the 2021 Legislative Session is going to be run. I've been keeping in contact with as many legislators as I can so we will be teed up before session starts. I want them to know that we are here, and are here to help.

We learned that Premera announced new procedures in billing for telehealth. As of September 1, 2020, they are no longer following the proclamation and rates for telehealth for mental health sessions are being reduced. I immediately contacted Rep. Eileen Cody (Chair of House Health Care) to figure out a way to remedy this issue. I've also been in contact with Sen. Annette Cleveland (Chair Senate Health Care), and Sen. Randi Becker (Prime sponsor of the original bill.) They are all working diligently on getting to the bottom of this issue.

What's on the Horizon?

The parity issue is currently on the forefront of our agenda. I am fearful that insurance companies are going to continue to find loopholes that would get around the legislation that will be implemented on January 1, 2021. Through meetings with legislators and lobbyists over the next few months, I feel confident that we will be able to solidify the intentions of the bill. All legislators acknowledge the importance of tele-health and they understand that you need to be paid fairly.

With the world in such turmoil, everyone is predicting the need for MHC's to continue to rise. Access to care is more important than ever and WMHCA needs to be on the forefront when it comes to strategizing ideas to improve mental health care in our state.

Other things I've been tracking or paying attention to?

We will continue to monitor any discussions regarding Volk as they arise. The coalition meetings were mostly canceled over the summer but there is talk in the group that they will be starting up again. I'm also monitoring any increases in licensing fees throughout the O2G account.

Once the election is over, bills can start to be introduced and it will be interesting to see what is going to be pre-filed.

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