

Lobbyist Report

January 2022



Meetings/Work groups attended:

Weekly:

Behavioral Health Coalition

Health Care Providers Lobbying Group

Senate Behavioral Health Subcommittees

Senate Health Care and Wellness

House Health Care and Wellness

And all other committees when relevant bills are being heard

Rep. JT Wilcox (House minority leader)

Sen. Yasmin Trudeau

Rep. Alicia Rule

Rep. Eileen Cody (Chair - House Health Care)

Rep. Dan Griffey

Sen. Curtis King

Legislative Summary for Mental Health Specifically

The legislative session began on January 10th and almost 1000 bills have been introduced in the House and Senate and there has been a multitude of behavior health and mental health bills included.

WMCHA has been very busy speaking with legislators and stakeholders to promote a budget proviso we are working on that asked the legislature to designate funds to create a work group. This work group will include LMHCs, LMFTs, LICSWs and other key stakeholders to look at ways to address the workforce shortage by decreasing the barriers to licensure. We have received positive feedback on this proposal but we have also heard from many legislators that we are on a tight timeline to produce results. The overall workforce shortage is one of the biggest concerns being addressed this year.

We are working with multiple stakeholders to request a 7% medicaid increase for providers. The Governor included a 4.5% increase but we are working diligently on both the House and Senate to get the number bumped up to at least 7%.

Other bills we are paying attention to are

[HB 1865](#) Addressing the behavioral health workforce shortage and expanding access to peer services by creating the profession of certified peer specialists. **(Concerns)**

[HB 1821](#) Concerning the definition of established relationship for purposes of audio-only telemedicine. **(Support)**

[HB 1834](#) Concerning student excused absences for mental health reasons. **(Support)**

[SB 5596](#) Conforming disclosure restrictions for mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers to the requirements of the Uniform Health Care Information Act. **(Concerns)**

[SB 5638](#) Concerning expediting approval for applicants for an associate license as a social worker, mental health counselor, or marriage and family therapist. **(Concens)**

[5644](#) Concerning providing quality behavioral health co-response services. **(Support)**

Meetings Requested

We are requesting and holding meetings with key legislators to discuss our priority bills. Members on Health Care Committees are the usual targets.

General Legislative News

The 2022 session is a short, 60-day election year session which began on January 10. Typically, even-year sessions are more focused and less ambitious than odd-year, 105-day budget writing sessions. The short session is an opportunity to update the state's two-year budget, respond to new crises, address unfinished business from the year before and make fixes to legislation that's already passed.

The state finds itself in a strong position fiscally thanks to better-than-anticipated revenue forecasts and one-time federal funding. The Governor has prioritized more money to address homelessness, reduce poverty, aid salmon recovery and combat climate change. He also funded pay increases for state employees. He did not, however, propose tax cuts.

One of the first orders of business was to address [WA Cares, the state's new long-term care insurance program](#). The first-in-the-nation benefit will provide qualified workers up to \$36,500 to spend on services such as in-home care and adaptive equipment. The program is funded by a payroll tax of \$0.58 on every \$100 earned. A bill moved very quickly with the Governor already signing a pause on the implementation of this tax and anyone who has already had deductions from their paychecks will be receiving a refund.

Last year, in response to the murder of George Floyd and other high profile police killings, Democrats passed a series of sweeping and historic police accountability measures. As the laws took effect, police departments said the new rules of the road were handcuffing their ability to respond to non-criminal calls and assist with people in mental health crises. Democrats are working to pass what are known as "trailer" or "clean-up" bills to clarify the intent of the police legislation and adjust the rules of engagement.

Other priority issues include:

- More COVID-19 aid for schools
- Efforts to address workforce shortages in healthcare
- Climate action proposals
- Addressing the state's growing homelessness crisis
- Advancing racial equity and justice

Cut off for all policy bills is February 3rd with fiscal bills having until the 7th. This means bills must pass out of their respective committees by those deadlines or they are considered "dead." We will continue to work on our priority issues and reevaluate how WMHCA moves forward after we see what bills are going to continue moving through the process.

What's on the Horizon?

We are talking to legislators about holding a work session during the interim to discuss insurance, billing and MCO concerns as we know this is a big issue within the profession.

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

Any bills that have an impact on behavioral health are being closely monitored. Please see our bill tracking sheet for more information.

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