



Department of Health  
2023-25 Regular Budget Session  
Policy Level - HW - Patient Safety Resource Awareness

### Agency Recommendation Summary

The Department of Health (department) requests funds to develop a public awareness campaign to better inform the public of disciplinary actions taken against health care providers and how to file complaint against a provider. The goal is to increase the use of these tools and empower the public to obtain information about a provider's background before choosing care and to act when they believe a provider has acted outside of the law or caused harm.

### Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
<b>Staffing</b>						
FTEs	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001 - 1	\$415	\$402	\$817	\$402	\$402	\$804
Total Expenditures	<b>\$415</b>	<b>\$402</b>	<b>\$817</b>	<b>\$402</b>	<b>\$402</b>	<b>\$804</b>

### Decision Package Description

The department regulates about a half million health care providers working in 85 different professions, in conjunction with boards and commissions. Part of our regulatory responsibility is to receive complaints against health care provider made by the public, investigate these complaints, and take disciplinary action against provider licenses when there is a violation of law. The department accepts complaints through a web reporting system. When disciplinary action is taken against a provider, the department posts this information to the agency website.

Knowing where to check a provider's license status is important for patients to make informed choices when seeking health care. When a patient has a concerning experience in a health care setting, knowing where to file a complaint is critical for the protection of other patients. However, neither of these vital patient safety tools has been advertised or promoted to the public, leaving a broad awareness gap in our state. In addition, there are barriers that make it difficult for the public to use these patient safety tools. Examples include web system interfaces that are difficult to navigate and only available in English. These challenges make it difficult for patients to make informed choices about their health care and may result in unsafe health care providers continuing to practice when they should be disciplined or barred from practice.

In December 2021, the Secretary of Health convened a Patient Safety Improvement Task Force (task force) to recommend strategies to resolve sexual misconduct cases more quickly and keep the public better informed when a provider is under investigation. One of the task force's recommendations to the Secretary was to seek funding for an ongoing public awareness campaign about:

1. how to check whether disciplinary action has been taken against a provider (using the Provider Credential Search tool on the department website) and
2. how to file a complaint against a health care provider (using an online reporting tool on the department website).

The department requests an ongoing GF-S appropriation to launch a sustained effort to increase public awareness about how to check a provider's credential status and file a complaint. This investment will enable the department to carry out the following activities:

- Contract with a social marketing agency to develop an ongoing statewide public outreach strategy aimed at all adults seeking health care services in Washington. The vendor will conduct audience research to better understand existing knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs related to these desired behaviors and to better understand barriers and benefits the audience perceives related to the complaint and credential verification system. The vendor will use this data to develop public education messages and approaches. Costs for this activity include a one-time investment for formative research, an on-going agreement with a social marketing agency to implement strategies (e.g., Google search advertisements, transit and billboard advertisements, digital advertising, and community-based media), and staff time to manage contracts;

- Improve health equity and language access by improving plain talk and accessibility of existing resources and translating web content and relevant tools into 37 priority languages spoken in Washington. Costs of this activity include webpage changes, development of materials, translation, user testing, and ongoing maintenance for sustained language access; and
- Provide on-going public outreach and education about provider credential search and complaint reporting through social media support. This will involve proactively posting social media content, scanning websites (e.g., Google Review, Yelp) for comments regarding complaints against health care providers and facilities, and responding to commenters with information about the department's complaint process. Costs associated with this activity include staff time to find and respond to reviews and posts on social media, or contracting for software to automatically find relevant posts and respond with designated information.

An alternative to funding an ongoing public awareness initiative would be to require health care providers to give information to their patients about Provider Credential Search and how to file a complaint. This would require a change in provider licensing statutes and would likely be met with significant opposition from health care providers. A potential downside of this approach is that providers who engage in professional misconduct may be disinclined to provide the required information to patients. Additionally, without the funding requested through this proposal, the department would be unable to address the existing linguistic and other barriers to filing complaints and looking up a provider's credential. A broad public awareness initiative, led by the department, is a better approach to ensuring all patients in Washington know about and can access these important patient safety tools.

The consequences of not taking any action is that many Washingtonians may remain unaware of how to check whether a provider has disciplinary action taken against them and how to file a complaint against a provider. In addition, the linguistic and other barriers the public may experience accessing these tools on the department's website will remain.

## Assumptions and Calculations

### **Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:**

N/A

### **Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:**

- One-time contract with a social marketing agency for formative research with key audience to understand current level of awareness and any barriers/benefits associated with our desired behaviors. (\$75,000 for FY 2024 only)
- Ongoing contract with a social marketing agency for outreach and education (\$500,000 per year in FY 2024 and FY 2025, and \$500,000 per biennium on-going)
  1. Ongoing contract with social marketing agency
  2. To include strategies such as:
  3. Google search ads
  4. Transit and billboard near health care settings
  5. Geo-fenced ads targeted at health care settings for patients actively seeking care
  6. Digital advertising
  7. Community-based media
- Translation costs for resources and improving language access within existing complaint and credentialing systems. (\$300,000 ongoing)

Department staffing to implement (see workforce assumptions below)

### **Workforce Assumptions:**

Workforce Assumptions FY24 Projections Only				
Job Classification	Salary	Benefits	Startup Costs	FTE Related Costs
HEALTH SERVICES CONSULTANT 3	\$113,000.00	\$46,000.00	\$6,000.00	\$11,000.00
WMS02	\$23,000.00	\$8,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$2,000.00
COMMUNICATIONS CONSULTANT 4	\$75,000.00	\$30,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$8,000.00
	<b>\$211,000.00</b>	<b>\$84,000.00</b>	<b>\$11,000.00</b>	<b>\$21,000.00</b>

## Strategic and Performance Outcomes

### **Strategic Framework:**

Results Washington

This proposal addresses the Governor’s Results Washington goal area of Healthy and Safe Communities by fostering the health of Washingtonians from a healthy start to safe and supported future by ensuring the public can hold providers accountable for misconduct and unsafe care and have the tools to be better informed before choosing a healthcare provider.

Department of Health Transformational Plan

The proposal supports the department’s Transformational Plan priority 1 (Health and Wellness) and priority 2 (Health Systems and Workforce Transformation) by providing greater transparency through a more robust provider credential search tool and a better-informed public that can alert the department to potential misconduct for investigation.

**Performance Outcomes:**

There are two major goals of this proposal.

1. Increase public awareness and ability to file a complaint about a department credentialed provider or facility.
2. Increase public awareness and ability to utilize the provider credential verification function on the DOH.WA.GOV website.

The expected outcomes are an increase in the number of complaints about a department credentialed provider or facility and increased visits to the provider credential verification system on the department website.

**Equity Impacts**

**Community outreach and engagement:**

The Patient Safety Task Force included outside stakeholders, professional associations, and individuals who had been harmed or experienced sexual misconduct. The department will continue to work with these and other historically excluded and marginalized communities as we develop the public awareness campaign to ensure we are reaching those populations.

**Disproportional Impact Considerations:**

This proposal will benefit populations that may have cultural or language barriers to submitting complaints. The research the department will conduct as part of this campaign should identify communities that may be reluctant to file complaints and the reasons for their reluctance. This could include communities of color and members of tribal nations.

**Target Populations or Communities:**

All populations and communities would benefit from this proposal, including underserved and underrepresented communities, and non-English speaking communities. This proposal should increase public safety, ensuring all Washington patients, including those in underserved and underrepresented communities, have an equal opportunity to be informed about their providers and receive safe care. This will be achieved by increasing access to culturally appropriate information in their own language about how to verify a health care provider's credential or file a complaint against a provider. These impacts could enhance quality of life and improve health outcomes.

**Other Collateral Connections**

**Puget Sound Recovery:**

N/A

**State Workforce Impacts:**

N/A

**Intergovernmental:**

N/A

**Stakeholder Response:**

Partner	Anticipated Position (Support, Neutral, Oppose)
Groups representing BIPOC communities	Support
Groups representing non-English speaking communities (asked Omar for assistance)	Support
Groups representing LGBTQ communities	Support
Tribes	Support
PCH	Support
C4PA	Support
HTS	Support
Agency Webmaster	Neutral
Health care providers	Oppose

**State Facilities Impacts:**

N/A

**Changes from Current Law:**

N/A

**Legal or Administrative Mandates:**

This proposal is in response to the Secretary of Health’s Patient Safety Improvement Task Force recommendations.

**Reference Documents**

[FNCal \\_ Public Awareness Campaign \(1\) \(1\).xslm](#)

**IT Addendum**

**Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?**

No

**Objects of Expenditure**

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
Obj. A	\$260	\$259	\$519	\$259	\$259	\$518
Obj. B	\$108	\$107	\$215	\$107	\$107	\$214
Obj. E	\$16	\$16	\$32	\$16	\$16	\$32
Obj. J	\$11	\$0	\$11	\$0	\$0	\$0
Obj. T	\$20	\$20	\$40	\$20	\$20	\$40

## Agency Contact Information

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