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HCS Newsletter

A NOTE FROM LEADERSHIP

The Office of Infectious Disease (OID) strives to work jointly with partners through the state to address HIV, STIs, viral hepatitis, and the health of people who use drugs, which represent a syndemic. A syndemic is when two or more health conditions and the social contexts in which they occur overlap and make each other worse. This turns into dire outcomes for people, such as rising transmission of infections, illness, and even death. Most critically, we strive to recognize and respond to the syndemic by centering communities that are inequitably impacted due to factors such as racism, poverty, homophobia, and transphobia.

We are grateful to work closely with the Washington Syndemic Planning Group (WSPG), which you will read more about in this newsletter. The WSPG includes community members with lived experience across the syndemic. The WSPG advises OID in our work. The group offers diverse views and experiences that support our efforts to build relationships and trust with communities of focus and strengthen our syndemic approach by using our resources with partners most able to reach these communities.

Contributor: Emalie Huriaux

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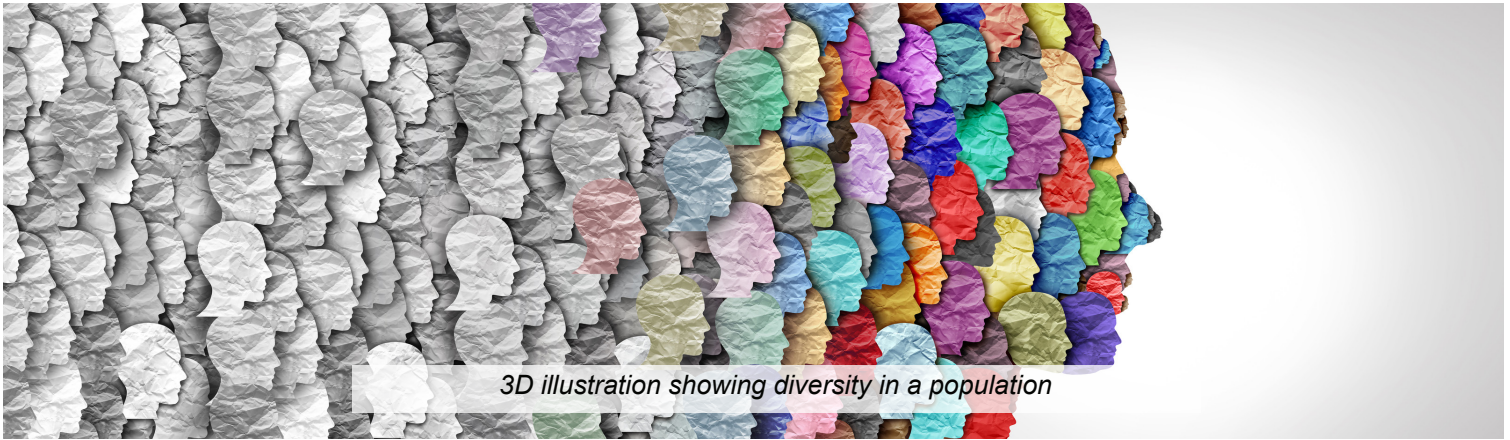
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Promoting Belonging and Well-being within the Washington Syndemic Planning Group



We live in a diverse and connected world. Thus, it's crucial to build workspaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging and wellbeing. Having workspaces available for people facing syndemic lived experiences is especially important. Syndemic is a conceptual framework for explaining interactions among multiple health conditions or diseases that can cause an increase public health burden on a group of people or community. Managing multiple health conditions is not easy, especially when people are dealing with various physical, emotional, and social experiences. And when you add trauma, social-economic and cultural factors to the mix, things can get much worse ([Singer & Clair, 2003](#)).

Making everyone feel like they belong and promoting their wellbeing is important to the members of the Washington Syndemic Planning Group (WSPG). The Washington State Department of Health Office of Infectious Disease (OID) set up this group. The group includes community members with lived experiences in HIV, viral hepatitis, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and drug use. The work done by this group focuses on understanding the experiences of people dealing with multiple health conditions and trauma, and the effect these have on people's behavior. This level of insight shows their commitment to **adopting trauma-informed approaches**. An event during a recent general meeting tested this commitment. During this event participants experienced a racialized, disruptive incident (a 'ZOOM raid'). OID staff arranged a special meeting for all members to discuss and understand what happened and brainstorm ways to prevent similar issues. During the meeting, members had the chance to share their experiences and stories. To help members face the issue together and grow stronger, OID staff provided resources and consultation support.

People with prior traumatic experiences feel safe and empowered in spaces where they feel understood and welcomed. To ensure that everyone in the WSPG feels valued, respected, and included, staff in OID strive to **create spaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging and appreciation for what they can contribute**. Creating safe and brave spaces where people trust each other and feel empowered fosters better understanding and communication. To accomplish this, the group puts an emphasis on building community through collaboration as part of the norms. They also make sure they **understand the effects of intersectionality and inclusivity**.

Promoting Belonging and Well-being within the Washington Syndemic Planning Group *continued...*

It is important for members to understand and recognize that different aspects of a person's identity and experiences can impact them in unique ways; this is especially true for people going through tough times. By acknowledging the positive impact social bonds, empowerment, and basic needs have on the health and wellbeing of people, members in the WSPG can make substantial contributions to address the health challenge connections of HIV, Viral Hepatitis (HCV), STIs, and Drug User Health. OID staff also advised members to recognize biases that might hinder inclusivity during talks. Members keep fairness and partnership in mind while making decisions and working on initiatives. Staff in OID also provide individual and collective check-in support and resources to help members feel empowered, strong, and invested in what they do.

Group discussions and insights during WSPG meetings focus on **building a sense of community and a culture of resilience and healing**. Talks center around groups of importance and communities most affected by healthcare disparities and marginalization. OID staff encourage members to support and build connections with one another between meetings. This helps them boost their interactions, amplify each other's voices, and advocate for one another within the group. By promoting a spirit of unity and creating supportive networks, the group can develop a shared sense of responsibility and commitment for everyone's wellbeing.

OID staff also encourage members to share events happening in their community. They also ask members to share their own experiences and stories of overcoming challenges during small group talks and during big group discussions. This helps everyone recognize and create a supportive culture and allows for healing to take place. During meetings, members have the choice to keep their camera on or off based on what makes them feel secure. They engage based on how they contribute to the work rather than how they present themselves. Language accessibility is important for the WSPG. This is why OID provides interpretation services during regular meetings. This way everyone can participate. Presenting agenda items as roundtable discussions allows for genuine conversations and ideas to flow. The group makes decisions by listening to everyone's ideas and aiming to be fair. The goal is to elevate the members' voices and hear their suggestions to help us improve healthcare for Washingtonians.

Besides making sure members of the WSPG have safe and brave spaces to conduct work, OID aims to ensure **diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)** are values rooted in the structural framework of the WSPG. DEI provides engagement, happiness, trust, and satisfaction among people. It also boosts creativity, decision-making, and performance by bringing new views, reducing bias, and promoting accountability. To ensure DEI is part of the WSPG committee efforts, projects, and policies, OID staff:

Promoting Belonging and Well-being within the Washington Syndemic Planning Group *continued...*

- Encourages diverse viewpoints and talks about cultural beliefs.
- Offers communication support, quarterly check-ins, and technical assistance to plan inclusive activities and align views
- Allows members to select their level of involvement based on their preferences.
- Encourages diverse information processing and communication styles during planning.
- Facilitates workgroup sessions alignment to match the objectives of the 13 goals to improved outcomes. Insights shared by members of the WSPG guided the development and execution of the 13 goals. An outline of these can be found in the [HIV Care and Prevention Integrated Plan](#). These efforts aim to address feedback on treatment, prevention, diagnosis, response, quality improvement, and health equity. To achieve these goals, WSPG uses [Targeted Universalism](#) and the [Vital Conditions for Health and Wellbeing](#). This allows efforts to center and align with the following key National strategies and initiatives:

- o [National HIV/AIDS Strategy \(2022-2025\)](#)
- o [Ending the HIV Epidemic in the United States](#)
- o [Sexually Transmitted Infections National Strategic Plan for the United States: 2021-2025](#)
- o [Viral Hepatitis National Strategic Plan: A Roadmap to Elimination for the United States: 2021-2025](#)
- o [CDC Overdose Prevention Strategy](#)
- o [CDC Syringe Services Programs \(2020\)](#)

Overall, it's important for organizations to create inclusive workspaces that support people with diverse syndemic lived experiences. Working towards creating a sense of belonging and wellbeing allows people to grow and contribute to crucial efforts like fighting HIV. When we value and include people of all walks of life, we can make communities that are healthier and stronger. **END**

Contributor: Starleen Maharaj–Lewis
Editors: Columba Fernandez & Vanessa Grandberry

DOH Welcomes NEW Staff



Photo of Amanda Tjemsland

Amanda Tjemsland, MPH

Pronouns: She/Her

Senior Tribal Epidemiologist

Center for Epidemiology Practice, Equity, and Assessment

Hi, I'm Amanda Tjemsland the new Senior Tribal Epidemiologist at the Center for Epidemiology Practice, Equity, and Assessment (CEPEA). I grew up in Sequim, WA and am a descendant of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe. I am excited to be in a role where I can work towards addressing health inequities among Native American communities in Washington State.

I began my public health career in the CDC's Public Health Associates Program where I was placed at the Albuquerque Area Southwest Tribal Epidemiology Center (AASTECC). At AASTECC, I first learned about the

various challenges Tribal communities face when trying to access their data. Since then, I have worked at the Veteran's Administration Palo Alto Health Care System and the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment in California. Prior to joining DOH, I was an Epidemiologist at Kitsap County Public Health District (KPHD) where I worked on several health equity projects.

Continued on next page...

DOH Welcomes NEW Staff *continued...*

In my new role, I will collaborate with Tribes and Tribal organizations to address their data needs and concerns. I will coordinate Tribal data and data system projects across DOH. In addition to developing best practices and creating reference materials related to Tribal data for DOH staff.

Joyce Jefferson

Pronouns: She/Her
Ryan White Part B Peer Navigator
Office of Infectious Disease

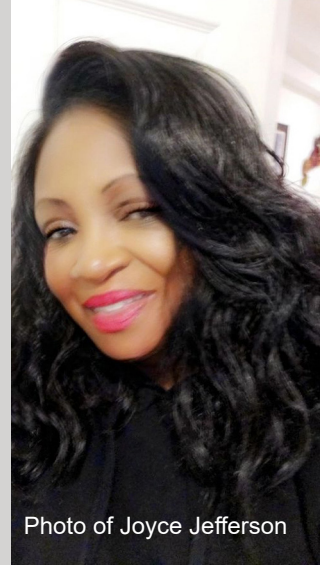


Photo of Joyce Jefferson

My name is Joyce Jefferson. I'm the Peer Navigator for Disease Control and Health Statistics for DOH. My passion for community work comes from being able to advocate in social determinates helping others cope in their health disparities, and helping build communities that are safe, healing, peaceful, welcoming, and healthy.

My other passion is helping people to find ways to meet or exceed their goals. Being a Peer Navigator, there's always a need for health education and connecting people with proper healthcare, housing, community services, and resources.

I have a motto I live by in working as a peer navigator. I meet people where they're at in the moment by honoring and respecting them in their current life journey, and not where I want them to be.

For fun I'm an avid doll collector; from vintage to modern ethnic, I've always been fascinated with dolls and have been able to instill that same appreciation of their history, value, and worth in my daughters and granddaughters.



Photo of Kayla Jackson

Kayla Jackson

Pronouns: She/They
HEAL Community Engagement Manager
Environmental Public Health

Hi, my name is Kayla Jackson and I started working at the Department of Health just a few weeks ago as the HEAL Community Engagement Manager. In this role, I support the agency to do meaningful and equitable community engagement to advance environmental justice, especially as it relates to the

HEAL Act. The HEAL Act is the first statewide law in Washington to create a coordinated state agency approach to environmental justice. I'm originally from the northeast and lived in various cities across the country before moving to Seattle around 7 years ago. I deeply believe that everyone has the right to a healthy and safe environment, and I am here to do my part to help make that a reality. I'm inspired by the struggle and resilience of my Black and Jewish ancestors, environmental justice advocates, and my experience working directly with frontline community members. I bring to this role years of experience as a facilitator, organizer, and policy analyst, working both in community-based organizations leading advocacy campaigns and within government on policy implementation.

DOH Welcomes NEW Staff *continued...*

Most recently, I was an Equitable Development Analyst at King County working to create more equitable land and housing development processes in collaboration with community members. I also received a B.A. from Carleton College and an M.P.A. from the Evans School at the University of Washington. Outside of work, I enjoy making ceramics and embarking on other various craft projects, exploring delicious foods around Seattle, and taking my dog on walks in local parks.

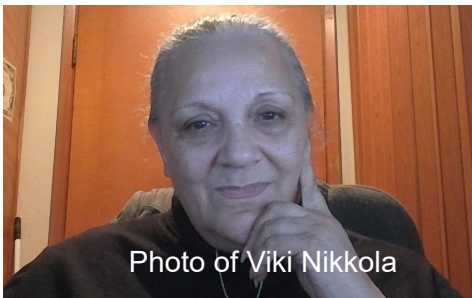
Shawnda Anderson-Ide

Pronouns: She/Her
Behavioral Health Medical Case Manager
Office of Infectious Disease

My name is Shawnda Anderson-Ide, I am an empty nester living with my Olde English Bulldogge Frankie and two cats, Kenya, and Morris. I love spending time with family and friends, especially my two daughters and two grandchildren. My professional career has primarily been working at nonprofits assisting individuals impacted by trauma, domestic violence and or homelessness.

I worked at the YWCA Pierce County for 21 years, 10 years as an advocate and 11 years as the Shelter Program Manager. My passion is to assist others in my community by creating innovative solutions and meeting people where they are at. Creative solutions that I have incorporated in the field of DV have been gender inclusive shelter, allowing pets in shelter, keeping families intact by allowing older boys in shelter, no curfew and not evicting residents for using drugs and alcohol. Instead, positioning the program on inclusivity and safety, not exclusivity.

I am really enjoying being an employee at DOH. The support, training and access to resources is vital and appreciated as I maneuver my clients through the hoops that support their medically healthy wellbeing. DOH's client focused model matches my own and ensures that my clients feel seen, heard, and valued. And assists me in developing a trusting partnership with each of my clients.



Viki M. Nikkila

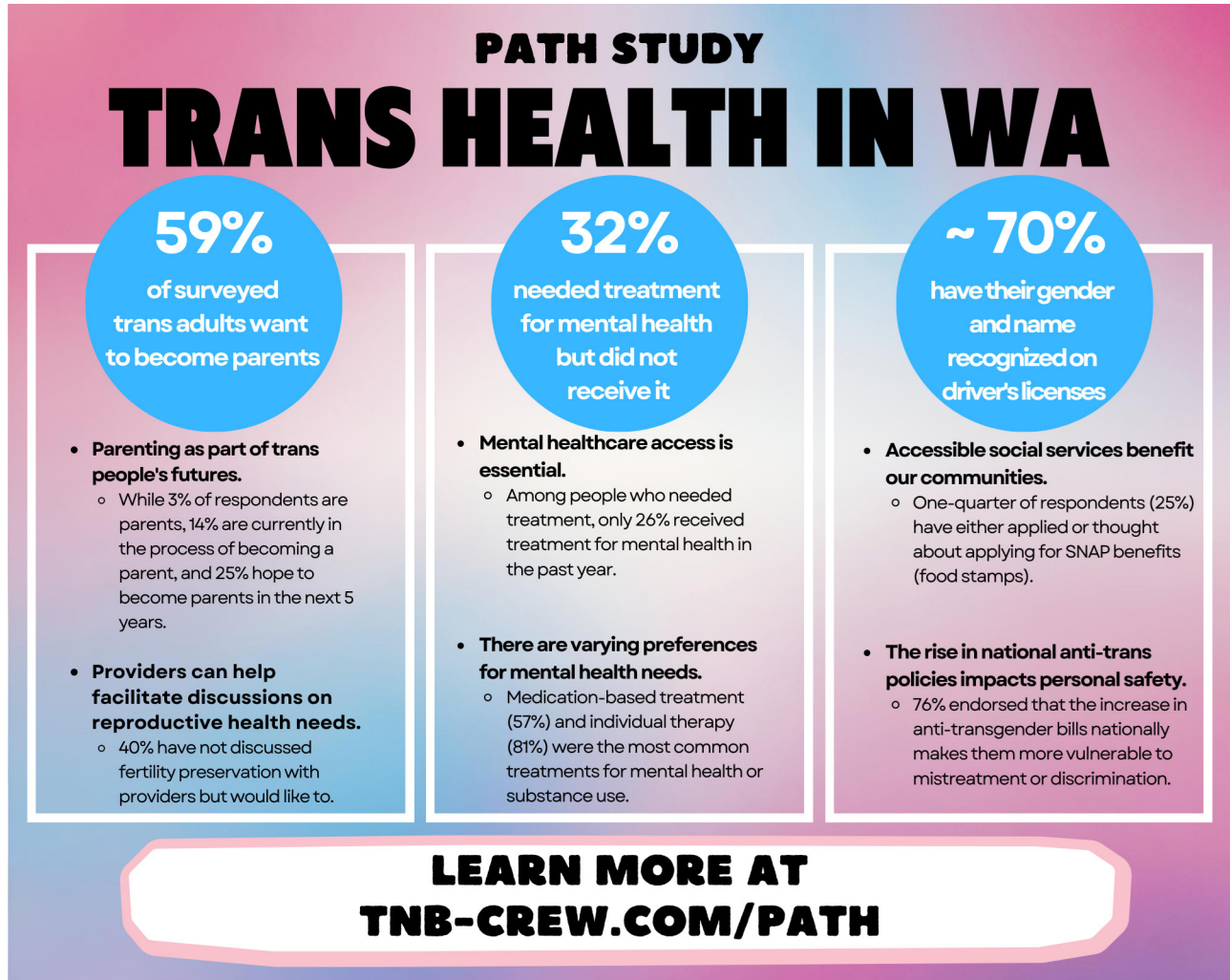
Pronouns: She/Her
Long Term Survivor Medical Case Manager
Ryan White Case Management Services
OID/DCHS

My name is Viki, and I am the Long-Term Survivor Medical Case Manager, and I am a woman of color, living with HIV.

I bring to the table with me, my lived experiences, which include substance use, homelessness and a multitude of many others. This has enabled me to connect to my community in different ways. From this, I have gained resilience and confidence that our HIV community can continue to thrive through one another and have learned that my community is LOVE.

In my spare time I love all animals and consider myself to be the (female) Dr. Doolittle, (LOL). I love listening to smooth jazz and creating poetry from the heart.

Study PATH to Trans-Health



The Transgender and Nonbinary Collective in Research Equity from Washington (TNB-CREW) is a group of Washington-based trans researchers, stakeholders, and community partners who are committed to advancing trans health across multiple domains, including health disparities, access to care, policy, and social justice through research and practice. The Priority Assessment in Trans Health (PATH) Study was created with the intention of centering trans voices in research. The PATH Study survey aimed to holistically characterize sexual and reproductive health, gender affirmation, healthcare access, mental health, access to cancer prevention treatment services, social support, and other domains of health among trans adults in Washington state. This survey was coupled with interviews with participants to better understand trans individuals' experiences with navigating sexual health services, barriers to care, and how to improve these services. The survey and interviews were created by trans researchers and our all-trans scientific and stakeholder advisory group (TSSAB).

The TSSAB is comprised of experts across areas of community engagement, trans health, health policy, community health, and social justice, with diverse lived experiences in WA.

The study is still recruiting for interviews, specifically prioritizing perspectives of Black, Indigenous, Latin, Asian and Pacific Islander, and other communities of color.

Learn more at tnb-crew.com.

Project FIRST Trans Survey is looking for participants until March 31st!



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