



KITSAP COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Efficient, accessible and effective county services

January 15, 2021

Robert Gelder
DISTRICT 1

Charlotte Garrido
DISTRICT 2

Edward E. Wolfe
DISTRICT 3

Governor Jay Inslee
Governor of the State of Washington
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

RE: Healthy Washington – Roadmap to Recovery and Vaccinations

Dear Governor Inslee:

Like so many others, we appreciate the challenges we all face in the response to the COVID pandemic and the difficult choices that you must make. We are thankful for your leadership on this matter which began nearly a year ago.

We echo the points made in the recent letter from the Washington State Association of Counties and the Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials (attached). We, too, wish to convey our concerns about the apparent change in direction and lack of communication and clarity, and to share some observations about involvement, transparency, confusion and COVID fatigue.

We have known for months that a vaccine is in development and requires a plan for distribution. Whereas the planning and response for actions such as testing and tracing fell squarely on the backs of our local public health officials to jointly manage with Emergency Management personnel, the decision to primarily use community providers for the vaccine rollout with minimal local public health engagement is concerning. The lack of communication and transparency is exacerbated by an inaccurate message of collaboration to the public. This very apparent disconnect is starting to unravel the already tired cloth of community patience and compliance.

From our vantage point, if the vaccination plan was under development and required providers to opt-in, why didn't the Department of Health proactively recruit providers mid last year? It appears the recruitment did not begin until the vaccines were on the way to our state. And then, the responsibility fell to local public health.

The tiered plan for vaccinations is confusing for many residents of the state who were deemed 'essential' personnel throughout the pandemic; yet do not find themselves detailed on the list to be vaccinated. For example, there are also essential public employees beyond those working in congregate settings that keep our streets passable (road crews) and the waters of Puget Sound safe (sewer utility workers). Can you help provide clarity?

After nearly eight months of a four phased plan to re-opening, which illustrates a methodical path to "normalcy", the new Roadmap to Recovery has just two phases. This new plan leaves the average citizen doubting there will ever be an end to the pandemic and a resumption of their lives in earnest.

Especially with no discernable difference between the two phases nor inclusion of how the rollout of vaccines might come to play (i.e. x% of the population is vaccinated moves a community to Phase Y). This leaves no guarantees citizens will not be left atop a proverbial metronome, constantly vacillating between phase 1 and 2 with the beat of every week that goes by.

We, as government, have asked a lot of our local business owners. One can argue that restaurants have suffered some of the worst impacts. Many are shuttering to never re-open. Under the new Roadmap - can they have indoor dining? Do they have to shut it down? On again, off again with the changing metrics. Business owners and their employees are only so resilient. Limited indoor dining in a building with HVAC appears no less impactful to community spread of COVID than outdoor dining surrounded with plastic, natural ventilation, and space heaters.

We pose these concerns not to cause offense, but to share with you the sentiments of those we all represent. It is difficult to expect people to continue being vigilant when they do not experience the why, the logic or the consistency behind decision making. If we lose them now and all the gains we have made, the vaccine distribution won't be able to keep up with the resultant disease spread because people have given up.

We have made so many strides together. We have top notch public health staff. But there seems to be pervasive thought that a top down approach is better without boots on the ground input.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and we hope that you and your leadership team can take some value in what we have offered.

Sincerely,



Robert Gelder
Chair

Charlotte Garrido
Commissioner

Edward E. Wolfe
Commissioner

cc: Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health
Washington State Association of Counties
Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials
Keith Grellner, Administrator, KPHD
Gib Morrow, MD, Health Officer, KPHD



January 12, 2021

Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH
Secretary of Health
111 Israel Rd SE
Tumwater, WA 98501

Secretary Shah:

Welcome to the State of Washington! You arrive during a very challenging time. As Secretary of Health, you play an important role in setting and maintaining a clear vision and direction for public health in Washington. As the local leaders of the governmental public health system, we look forward to working with you in implementing and strengthening public health in Washington State. We have worked together to implement a systems approach and partnered to support legislation (RCW 43.70.512) creating our governmental public health system here in Washington State:

“...comprised of the state department of health, state board of health, local health jurisdictions, sovereign tribal nations, and Indian health programs.”

This framework will advance foundational public health services, secure stable funding for core public health services, and help implement modernization efforts, such as the shared service models. These efforts will only be successful if each entity brings its unique perspectives and strengths to the table for collaboration. We hope that this spirit of collaboration continues, particularly in our state’s response and recovery from the pandemic.

We acknowledge that early in the pandemic response, our state had to make swift decisions based on scant data and science. This is no longer the case. While the urgency remains, we must act as a system and in a manner that promotes state and local input. It is imperative that entities in the system work together to maintain a clear and consistent path to recovery.

The recent development and rollout of “Healthy Washington — Roadmap to Recovery” is illustrative of our frustration and disappointment regarding the absence of a collaborative planning and decision-making process. In particular, the establishment of regions and metrics for the plan without consultation or meaningful engagement with local public health has failed to garner statewide support. Unfortunately, this plan has created confusion, divisiveness, and, in some instances, undermined our public health work.

This “Healthy Washington — Roadmap to Recovery” plan was presented to local health jurisdictions in two one-hour meetings, with no advance materials or details.

Department of Health (DOH) officials spent most of the meeting framing the proposal, leaving less than 30 minutes for questions. Many of these recommendations or decisions are not supported by local public health. Neither DOH nor the State of Washington did anything meaningful to actively consult or collaborate with local health jurisdiction administrators, local health officers, or local boards of health to build agreement or support for its plan to enact a regional approach and measurement metrics.

For the past decade, we have worked hard to collaborate and implement a foundational public health system framework that focused on the collective engagement of an interdependent state, local, and tribal government. We urge you to honor this approach as we work together toward the common goal of ending this pandemic.

Many decisions being touted by the Governor as “collaborative” have not been made in partnership with local health jurisdictions, local health officials, nor local boards of health. We adamantly disagree that there has been consistent collaboration by DOH and the State with counties and local health jurisdictions. The impression presented to the public that there is collaboration between state and local officials provides a false sense that these decisions are supported and agreed upon by local health administrators, local health officials, local board of health, or local elected officials.

Frankly, the lack of constructive engagement with local health jurisdictions is detrimental to our communities and fails to keep our residents safe. In fact, most of our local public health administrators and local health officials during this pandemic have clearly stated that public health is more than the absence of disease. Like an individual’s “whole health,” a community’s public health must be looked at more holistically to include behavioral, social, education, equity, and economic health.

Our small businesses, teachers, faith leaders, and healthcare partners turn to local public health for clarity and guidance when state decisions are made. We cannot offer consistent answers to questions about state decisions we have had minimal input in. We risk more resistance and disregard when our communities do not feel supported or their questions adequately answered. Local public health and local elected officials are acutely aware and sensitive to these voices and will bring them into discussions with the state. It is unfortunate that rather than bringing the diversity of our state into the decision-making process, local contexts and nuances have been ignored and discounted.

Moving forward, and as additional phases are developed to “Recover” Washington State, it is so important that we provide a sense of hope, optimism, and true recovery to our citizens. In doing so, we recommend the creation of a Secretary’s COVID 19 Public Health System Response Team that includes:

- Local Health Jurisdiction Administrators;
- Local Health Officers;
- Local Board of Health Members;
- State Board of Health; and
- Tribal Governments.

The purpose of this Response Team is to provide a true forum for real, consistent, and meaningful collaboration on state and local COVID-19 response efforts going forward.

The one-year anniversary of the pandemic is approaching, and we are proud that Washington, once the epicenter of COVID-19 in the United States, worked incredibly hard to keep rates down and reduce the spread of this disease. We are a success story, but we should not be blind to the lessons this pandemic has taught us. We best serve our communities, protect our families and neighbors, and recover when we are working together. We share your commitment, enthusiasm, and desire to keep Washington safe. We are one public health system; let us do this work together.

Washington State Association of Counties



Michael Largent, President
Whitman County Commissioner



Jamie Stephens, 1st Vice President
San Juan County Councilmember



Mary Kuney, 2nd Vice President
Spokane County Commissioner



Robert Gelder, Immediate Past President
Kitsap County Commissioner

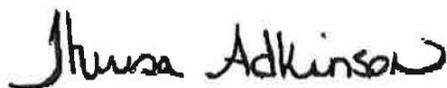
Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials



Astrid Newell, WSALPHO President
Whatcom County Health Department



Keith Grellner, WSALPHO President-Elect
Kitsap Public Health District



Theresa Adkinson, WSALPHO Past President
Grant County Health District



Dave Windom, WSALPHO Past President
Mason County Community Services