

Bringing Community Voice into Cross-Sector Data Sharing: **Reducing Poverty in Washington State**

Since 2020 — with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and widespread racial reckoning — there have been many national and local discussions related to longstanding structural racism and the need to address the root causes that lead to health and economic inequities. During this time, Washington State committed to addressing the systemic issues that lead to health and economic inequities for those living in the state. This commitment includes creating a state culture that centers communities that have been historically marginalized in state policy, budget, and program decision-making.

As part of [Learning and Action in Policy and Partnerships](#) (LAPP), a national initiative that supports community-based data sharing efforts, Washington's Department of Social and Health Services and community partners collaborated to center people and communities historically excluded from economic well-being in state policy, program, and funding efforts to accelerate poverty reduction.

Through the initiative, Washington State explored the following questions: (1) What does it look like to center the communities and people who stand to benefit the most from equitable economic recoveries?; (2) What data are important to community members?; and (3) How would community members define equitable economic recovery?

AT-A-GLANCE

- **Community Health Goal:** Reduce poverty and inequality in COVID-19 recovery efforts and improve overall economic well-being.
- **Partners:** Washington State's Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration (project lead); Statewide Poverty Action Network; and Front & Centered.
- **Project Highlight:** Created a shared vision with communities historically excluded from economic well-being and included them in state decision-making processes. Began to address the root causes that lead to health and economic inequities for Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).
- **Policy-Level Impact:** Galvanized efforts to reduce poverty across the state, including the creation of a Subcabinet on Intergenerational Poverty via Governor's Executive Order. In addition, Washington State passed legislation (SB 5793) on compensation of lived expertise.

BRINGING COMMUNITY VOICE INTO CROSS-SECTOR DATA SHARING

Sharing data across state agencies and community-based organizations is critical for advancing health equity and addressing complex health challenges that involve multiple sectors. Insights from individuals with lived expertise provide valuable context to inform data-sharing efforts that is critical to improving health equity. This case study is a product of [Learning and Action in Policy and Partnerships](#), a national initiative led by Data Across Sectors for Health in partnership with the Center for Health Care Strategies and supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

To answer these questions, the Washington State LAPP team, led by Washington State’s Department of Social and Health Services, Economic Services Administration partnered with the Statewide Poverty Action Network (an anti-poverty organizing group) and Front & Centered (a coalition of groups led by communities of color in Washington State). They worked together to: 1) create a shared vision and definitions for an “equitable economic recovery” and a “just and equitable future” in partnership with communities historically excluded from economic well-being; 2) design and implement a timely, collaborative, transparent, and accountable process to build a shared vision with state, municipality, and community partners; and 3) ensure the expertise, stories, and experiences of people and communities historically excluded from well-being are included in decision-making.

Key Project Activities

Washington State’s lead community partners, Statewide Poverty Action Network and Front & Centered, convened community members for 13 listening sessions throughout the state to develop a vision for community-defined measures for economic well-being and state policies that advance community defined economic well-being, and to propose a governance process for including community members in state decision-making. This work sought to ensure that state efforts to create an economy that is sustainable, equitable, and just was informed by communities they aimed to serve.

In parallel, the Washington State agencies met regularly to share the lessons from these listening sessions across state government to embed lived expertise into state-level programs and policies. These discussions acknowledged the generations of institutional harm inflicted by the government to BIPOC communities and focused on building trust among community partners. State agency staff also discussed how to best compensate individuals with lived expertise for their contributions.

Data-Sharing Accomplishments to Improve Community Health and Advance Equity

As a result of the statewide listening sessions, state and community partners co-created a community-led assembly model to guide future efforts to involve community members in decision-making processes. Core elements of the model include:

- **Develop universal understanding and measures of economic well-being.** Community members identified qualitative and quantitative indicators of well-being for state agencies to measure and be accountable for addressing.
- **Establish commitment.** Agencies incorporated racial equity analysis and community input in policy, budget, and strategic plan decisions.

- **Build capacity.** Agencies considered funding and supporting a statewide network of “Community Assemblies,” led by community-based organizations, to provide leadership, direction, and co-governance oversight.
- **Establish equitable practices.** Participants developed a “community equity and accountability” framework to apply to agency practices and activities (e.g., rules, budgeting, and contracting processes).
- **Share governing power with community members.** Agencies created guidelines and tools on how to decentralize power within their leadership structure.

These themes were shared with the Governor and other state agency leadership, including the Department of Commerce, Employment Security Department, Department of Social and Health Services, Department of Health, Health Care Authority, Office of Financial Management, among others, and community partners to improve poverty reduction efforts.

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services focused on identifying opportunities to make cultural changes within the department to better support partnerships with community members. For instance, rather than relegating community members to solely the role of providing input during a meeting (which can feel exploitive or performative), the team sought to either flip power or engage community members as partners with an emphasis on building trusting, long-term relationships.

The collaboration between community members and state agency leaders in Washington State led to newly passed [legislation](#) related to the compensation of community members. Furthermore, to ensure that data are reflective of the experience of community members, Washington State is hiring three data staff who will work with community members to better understand the context of data that is measured in the state. This effort also attracted interest across other state agencies, prompting the Washington State LAPP team to develop a subcommittee across state agencies involved in poverty reduction work, including involvement from the Department of Social and Health Services’ Poverty Reduction Workgroup/Steering Committee and Equitable Recovery Committee; the Department of Health’s Environmental Justice Committee and its Health Equity Zones Committee; the Commerce Department’s Office of Homeless Youth Committee; among others.

Looking Ahead

There is growing multi-agency momentum to incorporate lived expertise into Washington State’s policy, budget, and programmatic decision-making. Many agencies are learning from these examples and working to standardize how to work with

community members, and value and compensate the expertise of people and communities most affected by injustice.



ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES

The Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) is a policy design and implementation partner devoted to improving outcomes for people enrolled in Medicaid. We support partners across sectors and disciplines to make more effective, efficient, and equitable care possible for millions of people across the nation. For more information, visit www.chcs.org.

ABOUT DATA ACROSS SECTORS FOR HEALTH

Data Across Sectors for Health (DASH) is a national initiative launched by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to improve community health, well-being and equity, by fostering greater alignment among health care, public health, and other community-based social systems to improve multi-sector collaboration and data sharing. For more information, visit www.dashconnect.org.