



**COMMUNITY
HEALTH NETWORK**
of Washington™



Local Housing Policy: Overview

A Resource for Community Health Centers and Stakeholders

[Introduction](#)



Community Health Network of Washington (CHNW) represents 21 of the 28 Community Health Clinics (CHCs) in Washington; our clinics are trusted local partners in towns and cities throughout Washington State. Our policy and lobbying efforts are deeply entwined with the needs of the communities and people we represent, meaning we advocate for policy solutions that we are certain will have a positive impact on patients, clinics, and communities.

With housing insecurity and homelessness as one of the most significant social determinants of health (SDOH) affecting people across the state, we recognize the need to support upstream policy changes to promote the availability of affordable housing across the state and support keeping Washington residents housed. Housing has been a key priority for Community Health Plan of Washington's (CHPW's) state legislative advocacy, and we recognize that much of housing policy is grounded in local communities around Washington. To promote and support this work, we created a series of policy papers to educate, share resources, and promote housing policy advocacy at the local level. The policy papers will focus on the following topics:

1. **Introduction**
2. Definitions, legislative tracking tools, and additional resources
3. Specific populations
4. Zoning laws, tenant protections, and criminalization of homelessness
5. Affordable housing sales taxes, document recording fees, and levies
6. Community engagement, comprehensive plans, and local CHC advice/best practices

Introduction

All levels of government – federal, state, and local – are necessary partners to work toward solving the homelessness and housing insecurity problems in Washington State. Bills and budget provisos established on the state level often require attention, engagement, investment, and support from local communities to ensure the legislature’s vision and intent is fully executed and implemented. Similarly, the work of local communities and governments may spread to other surrounding areas; the goals and vision of members of the state legislature often both inspire and are inspired by members of their communities and legislative districts in proposing innovative solutions or policy changes in the effort to solve homelessness.

For example, state Rep. Jessica Bateman worked with Rep. Andrew Barkis to pass House Bill 1110 referred to as the “middle housing” bill in 2023. This bill updates city zoning laws to allow for an increase in middle income housing like duplexes and townhouses. Rep. Bateman recognized that housing is increasingly out of reach for members of her community, as well as other communities around the state; this served as motivation for taking steps on statewide solutions: *“Families across our state are counting on us to address this urgent crisis by creating more homes for Washington...When first-time homebuyers can only afford a home in three of our counties, it’s clear that the status quo isn’t working. We need to make it easier to build diverse housing options statewide to meet our state’s growing needs.”*¹

A related 2023 bill, Senate Bill 5045, sponsored by state Sen. Patty Kuderer incentivized the construction of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and the rental of those ADUs to low-income households across the state of Washington. The bill outlines how ADUs may be exempt from property taxes, at the discretion of the local community, if the property is maintained as a rental unit for qualifying low-income households. This is an effort to promote and preserve the availability of affordable housing units to low-income individuals and families who may otherwise be priced out of their community. It can be replicated in communities across Washington. The bill's success ultimately depends on local communities and counties committing to increasing their housing supply and making housing more affordable. Therefore, the success of this statewide bill is intrinsically linked to the support, participation, advocacy, and buy-in from local governments to work to keep community members housed.

Background on Community Health Plan and Network of Washington

Community Health Network of Washington (CHNW) represents 21 of the 28 Community Health Centers (CHCs) in Washington State. Our member clinics are trusted local community partners in towns and cities throughout Washington. CHNW is the parent company of Community Health Plan of Washington (CHPW) which is a not-for-profit founded more than 30 years ago by Washington Community Health Centers (CHCs) on the frontlines serving low-income and underserved communities. CHPW staff live and work in communities throughout Washington State, providing care and resources grounded in the communities CHPW serves.

CHPW serves Washingtonians through four health plans – Apple Health (Medicaid), Apple Health Expansion, Medicare Advantage, and Individual & Family Plans (Cascade Select - public option).

¹ <https://housedemocrats.wa.gov/bateman/2023/03/06/bipartisan-modest-middle-housing-bill-passes-house/>

Because our clinics are rooted in community and intentionally designed to address the community's needs, especially those who are most vulnerable, CHNW is able to leverage their knowledge, experience, leadership, collective values and community connections to inform our advocacy on policy at the local, state, and federal level. Our policy and lobbying efforts are deeply entwined with the needs of the communities and people we represent, meaning that we take action on policy that we are certain will impact clinics, patients, and communities.

Purpose

The information provided in this policy paper should serve as a reference, as of July 2024, on how to engage with the ever-increasing and ongoing advocacy, policy changes, and other efforts in local communities across Washington to propose incentives, commit to projects, and make investments that promote and create affordable housing to meet the needs of low-income Washingtonians. We created the information and resources shared here to provide CHCs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) tools and ideas to aid in engaging with housing policies at the local level.

Within this document, you will find an overview of local community policies around Washington State, with information on key policy initiatives like levies, affordable housing sales and use taxes, zoning laws, and tenant protections, as well as a discussion on the increase in homelessness criminalization and ways to address and influence local policies. Throughout each of these sections, we highlight local stories and examples, along with insights from health centers engaged in housing policy work across Washington State. We provide resources on ways to advocate for initiatives that promote and protect affordable housing, keys to success, and best practices. Additional references and resources like a terminology guide and bill tracking resources are included to support continued engagement efforts.

Ultimately, we hope the information provided in these policy papers allows you or your organization to take steps to ensure all Washingtonians have access to safe, secure, and affordable housing.

Goal

The goal of this resource is to highlight opportunities to engage in local housing policy work in your community as well as providing tools, resources, and toolkits to support those efforts.

For CHCs: This is a great opportunity to advocate for your housing-insecure and patients experiencing homelessness, and to build relationships with housing providers and advocacy groups in your community.



Guiding Questions:

What are the key housing issues and needs in your community?

- What feedback do your patients share about their housing needs?
- What have you heard or learned from other community partners working in housing?
- Screening patients, collecting data, and sharing data with local stakeholders about their housing status and needs may serve as a starting point in understanding the current needs and gaps in your community and strategies to close those gaps.

With that understanding in mind, you can use these resources to help determine ways to create change and advance affordable housing in your area.

What is the current state of housing policy and advocacy in your community? Are there any local efforts in place?

- Does your community have an existing housing levy?
- Does your community have an affordable housing sales tax?
- Has zoning been a barrier to developing affordable housing in your area? [Each community in Washington State is different, but you can use this guide to gain a better understanding of possible policy interventions, learn about current efforts in your community, and/or use the knowledge gained to help build or inform new initiatives.](#)

Does your CHC currently engage in policy work around housing?

- What does your current housing policy platform look like?
- Is it focused on state or local-level work?

If housing is not a focus, or if the focus is only on a statewide level, you can use this guide to inform your efforts to expand or engage in local advocacy.

What does the housing landscape look like in your community?

- Does your organization currently partner with housing providers, local government, and/or community coalitions? What is the scope of these partnerships, and what is your organization's role?

Consider your existing partnerships and ways to grow to collaborate on housing policy efforts and advocacy in your community. For more information about developing health and housing partnerships, access our previously published toolkit: <https://www.chpw.org/bulletin-board/health-and-housing-toolkit/>

