



**COMMUNITY
HEALTH NETWORK**
of Washington™



Local Housing Policy Overview

A Resource for Community Health Centers and Stakeholders

Community Engagement, Comp Plans, and Local Advice

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 drivers 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 have created a series of white papers to educate, share resources, and promote housing policy advocacy at the local level:

1. Introduction
2. Definitions, legislative tracking tools, and additional resources
3. Special 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**

Community Engagement

Community Action

One of the best ways to engage in local housing policy work is through engaging in community coalitions and building relationships with others in your community either advocating for or working directly with the unhoused community. This is also a way to engage people who have lived experience with homelessness or peer advocates. One agency to connect with is the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance¹, which leads advocacy work across the state of Washington. They operate mostly at a statewide level but are also a resource for local organizing. You or your organization can become a member to directly support and can sign up for action alerts. Community members with lived experience of homelessness and/or housing insecurity can also engage in their Resident Action Project.



Guiding Question to Consider

1. What housing organizations, coalitions, or advocacy groups are active in your community? Do you have established partnerships with these organizations? Are there opportunities to build partnerships?

¹ <https://www.wliha.org/>

Community action is Washington’s safety net and backbone. Community Action Agencies² play a key role in helping people get back to work and build a strong foundation for Washington’s future by creating and preserving jobs. In addition, these agencies invest in people to develop their competencies, support their education, and assist in finding employment. Many of these agencies offer housing-related programs and services, and/or serve community members who are housing insecure.



Washington State Community Action Partnership

WSCAP is a “nonprofit organization created to provide a unified voice for community action agencies in advocacy, policy, programmatic, and legislative issues affecting families and communities in the state of Washington.” The organization provides training and technical assistance to 30 different community-based organizations to ensure high-quality professional services for those seeking assistance.

Continuum of Care is a “a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximize self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness.” These programs differ across communities, but many are involved in funding housing programs, coordinating programs (such as coordinated entry), conducting policy and advocacy work, administering community assessments, and building coalitions. They are a great opportunity to build relationships with housing providers in your region.

Local Comprehensive Plans

Comprehensive plans (known commonly as “comp plans”) are required for many cities and counties in Washington State as part of the Growth Management Act. These plans create a vision for future planning that outlines the community’s goals around housing, transportation, environmental protections, and other related areas. This process is meant to be collaborative and often involves community stakeholder listening sessions through public community meetings and surveys. Cities that are recipients of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding are required to do some level of community outreach to identify barriers to fair housing and develop solutions. Input is often gathered more broadly and on a recurring basis around city comprehensive plans – within which housing should be a key focus.



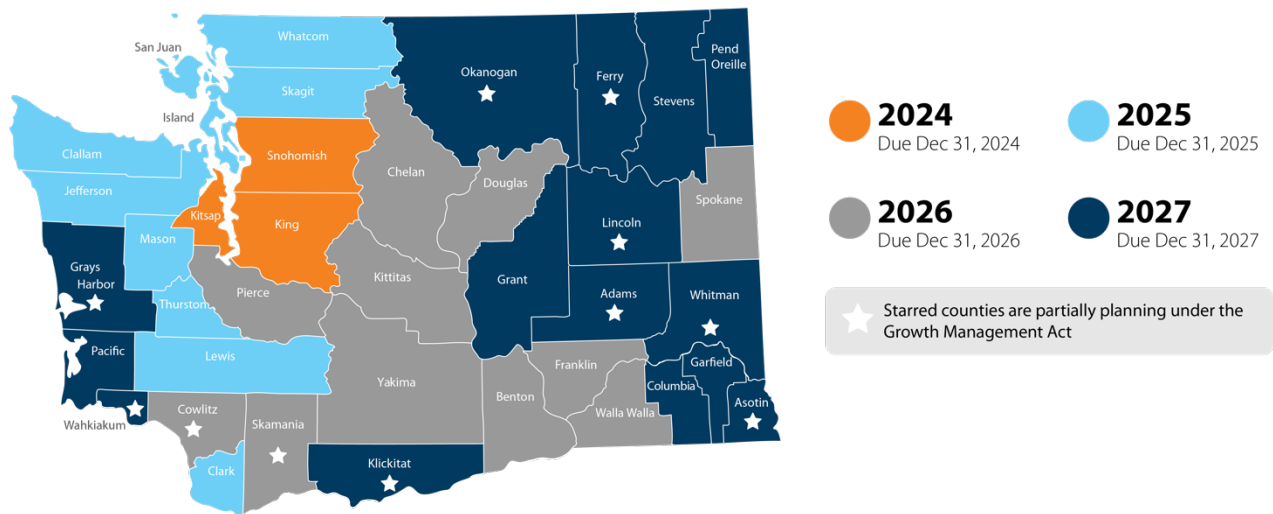
Guiding Question to Consider

1. Is your city or county currently working to update any local comprehensive plans? Are there ways to engage and give feedback, either now or in the future?

Comp plans are updated every 10 years, with revisions possibly necessary within the decade depending on urban growth changes. Cities and counties are also required to coordinate with any neighboring jurisdictions – for instance, King County is required to collaborate with Snohomish and Pierce Counties.

² <https://wapartnership.org/agencies>

Per the Dept. of Commerce’s Growth Management Updates pages^{3,4} Between now and 2027, counties across the state will be starting the process of updating their plans:



Some recent examples include One Seattle⁵ Plan – the comprehensive plan for the city which includes information on housing, as well as land use, transportation, economic development, and other community needs. To gather input on this process, Seattle hosted various community meetings in each of the local districts; both at and outside those meetings, many community organizations came together to provide a response to the comprehensive plan and ways to improve⁶. The city of Spokane has also been hosting public forums to gather input on its 2024 Fair Housing Plan, while the city of Everett sent out a survey to community stakeholders requesting input on their 2025-2029 Consolidated Plan, which is comprehensive and involves input on housing needs⁷.

Comp plan advocacy is a great way to engage in local planning and efforts to create more affordable housing in your community. What engagement looks like on the local level varies by city. Seattle built the Complete Communities Coalition and the Eastside for All (focusing on east King County) group specifically to advocate for improving the comp plan proposal and account for additional housing needs. While other cities do not have dedicated comp plan advocacy groups, they often depend on existing affordable housing community groups that address comp plan advocacy as a part of their platform.

More information on the Growth Management Act and Comprehensive Plan resources can be found here: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/local-government-5-year-plans/>.

³ <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/periodic-update/>

⁴ <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/local-government-5-year-plans/OneSeattlePlanDraftPlan2024.pdf>

⁶ [Microsoft Word - CompleteCommunitiesCoalition PositionPaper 2024.3.13 \(housingconsortium.org\)](#)

⁷ [2025 - 2029 Consolidated Plan Needs Survey \(surveymonkey.com\)](#)

Statewide Agencies

The State Advisory Council on Homelessness⁸ is a statewide forum hosted by Washington’s Dept. of Commerce and includes stakeholders from various different sectors that all do work around housing and homelessness. If you are interested in additional statewide available resources including funding opportunities, the Dept. of Commerce is a reliable resource.

Other local advocacy groups include your local county Housing Consortium and Fair Housing Alliance. For more information on how to develop partnerships between health and housing providers – see our [Health and Housing Partnership Toolkit](#)⁹.

Importance of sharing community stories

One of the most effective ways to advocate for patients and community is to elevate their stories (with consent). People respond more positively and powerfully to personal narratives and storytelling than they do to data. The Housing Justice Narrative Initiative has several resources on how to create messaging that centers community and can support advocacy efforts¹⁰, including a messaging guide and narrative toolkit. These can support both social media campaigns or direct conversations via community forums or with local, state, or federal lawmakers.



⁸ [State Advisory Council on Homelessness](#)

⁹ https://www.chpw.org/wp-content/uploads/content/provider-center/bulletinboard/CHNW_Health_and_Housing_Toolkit.pdf

¹⁰ <https://housingnarrative.org/node/60901>

To gain a better understanding of the CHC perspective and role in local housing policy, in 2023 and 2024 a series of meetings were hosted with health centers across the state of Washington to discuss what they view as the most important local housing policy areas, the impacts of criminalization, strategies for community engagement and partnership, pain points, and keys to success when it comes to local housing policy work.

As a result of these discussions, we compiled a list of best practices, suggestions, and advice from conversations with representatives from CHCs and others involved in the housing space. This list is not comprehensive; however, we hope it provides some key insights and inspiration into how you can better advocate for housing affordability, accessibility, and availability in your communities – whether you are from a health center or not! CHNW aims to continue to collect feedback on the housing needs in local communities and what local housing policies our Community Health Centers find most impactful.