

2022 ISSUE PAPER: HEALTH CARE

Position statements:

The LWVWA position on health care states that health care policies need to “ensure universal access for all residents to a comprehensive, uniform, and affordable set of health services. These services shall be available regardless of one’s health status (i.e., pre-existing conditions) or financial status.”

The LWVUS position on health care states that the League “believes that a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost should be available to all U.S. residents. Every U.S. resident should have access to a basic level of care that includes the prevention of disease, health promotion and education, primary care (including prenatal and reproductive health), acute care, long-term care and mental health care. Every U.S. resident should have access to affordable, quality in- and out-patient behavioral health care, including needed medications and supportive service that is integrated with, and achieves parity with, physical health care. Dental, vision, and hearing care also are important but lower in priority. The League believes that under any system of health care reform, consumers/patients should be permitted to purchase services or insurance coverage beyond the basic level. The League favors a national health insurance plan financed through general taxes in place of individual insurance premiums. As the United States moves toward a national health insurance plan, an employer-based system of health care reform that provides universal access is acceptable to the League.”

Summary of Issues of the 2021 Legislative Session

The 2021 Legislative Session, known as the long session, 105 days, is the first year of the biennium 2021-2022. Many new health and behavioral health bills were passed and signed into law by Gov. Inslee.

- SB 5399 established the Universal Health Care Commission. This 15-member commission has the responsibility to continue to develop a path to provide universal coverage.
- HB 1086 Creating the State Office of Behavioral Health Consumer Advocacy passed.
- HB 1325 The Partnership Access Line (PAL) for parents needing child/teen behavioral health services was established.
- SB 5195 Concerning Prescribing Opioid Overdose Reversal Medication passed.
- HB 1196 Concerning audio-only telemedicine passed, which requires reimbursement for audio-only telemedicine services.
- HB 1225 Concerning School-based Health Centers that will develop and award grant funding for school-based clinics and coordinate with the statewide nonprofit organization, educational service districts, the Health Care Authority, hosting school districts, and the Office of the Insurance Commissioner to provide support to SBHCs.
- SB 5052 Concerning the creation of health equity zones. The state intends to work with community leaders within the health equity zones to share information and coordinate efforts with the goal of addressing the most urgent needs.
- SB 5068 Improving maternal health outcomes by extending coverage during the postpartum period. Postpartum Medicaid coverage currently ends 60 days after pregnancy. Extending health care coverage through the first year postpartum is one of the best tools for increasing access to care and improving maternal and infant health.

Priorities for the 2022 Legislation Session:

- HB 1047 Requiring coverage for hearing instruments for children and adolescents. A health carrier offering a health plan issued or renewed on or after Jan. 1, 2023, must include coverage for hearing instruments for persons who are 18 years of age or younger, with refitting every 36 months.
- SB 5142 Establishing the profession of Dental Therapist will be re-introduced. Adding the dental therapist to the dental team will expand the dental clinic team and address racial and ethnic disparities in urban and rural dental health care.
- HB 1141 Increasing access to the Death with Dignity Act. Makes changes to the 2009 Death with Dignity Act, mainly changes 'physician' to 'qualified medical provider.' Eliminates the 15-day waiting period and reduces it to 72 hours.
- SB 5335 Concerning the acquisition of health care facilities and mergers. Health system acquisitions must improve, rather than harm, access to affordable quality health care. The legislature is committed to ensuring that Washingtonians have access to the full range of reproductive, end-of-life, and gender affirming health care services.
- HB 1499 Providing behavioral health system responses to individuals with substance use disorder. The Pathways to Recovery Act (1) increases funding for substance use disorder treatment and recovery programs, (2) adopts a public health-based approach by eliminating penalties for personal use drug offenses and connecting people with services to address the root causes of their substance use disorder, and (3) expands resources for statewide education about substance use.
- SB 5020 Assessing a penalty on unsupported prescription drug price increases. This bill would allow a penalty to drug manufacturers who increase drug prices without providing new clinical evidence.

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Coalitions joined:

- Health Care is a Human Right Coalition-WA: www.healthcareisarithwa.org
- WA State Dental Access Campaign: www.wadentalaccess.com