



2023 Issue Paper: Health Care

Position Statement

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.” At the 2022 National Convention the membership adopted by concurrence the New York’s position on a Single Payor Universal Health care Plan paving the way for Leagues to advocate fully for well vetted state and national proposals.

Review of the 2022 Session

The following is important health care legislation which was passed and was supported by the League. These were signed into law by Gov. Inslee. This is legislation with potential to move us closer to more equitable health care by reducing barriers, expanding services, increasing scope of practice for health care providers, and limiting financial burdens for consumers.

Legislation Reducing Barriers:

- The most expansive of these and with potential for system transformation is the Apple Health & Homes Program.
- HB 1866 The Apple Health & Homes Program provides a permanent supportive housing benefit and a community support services benefit to persons who meet eligibility criteria related to income, medical risk factors, and barriers to finding stable housing. It establishes the Office of Apple Health & Homes within the Department of Commerce and the Apple Health & Homes Account.

Workforce and Scope of Practice Expansion Legislation:

- HB 1622 Sexual Assault Nurse Education (SANE), increasing the availability of SANE nurse examiner education in rural and underserved areas. Washington State University is to establish two programs: 1) a SANE online and clinical training program and 2) a regional SANE leadership

pilot program. This bill has the effect of reducing cases of rapes not being fully investigated and women receiving more sensitive and appropriate care after being raped.

- 1851 Preserving a pregnant individual's ability to access abortion care expands abortion provision to include providers in addition to physicians to include Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants and other health care providers acting within their scope of practice. The bill also provides important legal protections for providers of abortion care.
- HB 1124 Nurse Delegation of Glucose Allows bill allows a Registered Nurse to delegate glucose monitoring and testing to a trained certified nursing assistant or trained home care aide within the scope of the Registered Nurse's practice. Adequately trained support staff are critical for supporting registered nurses and ultimately consumers.
- HB 1881 Establishes a voluntary certification process for birth doulas, a first step in reimbursement by Medicaid for those services. This bill holds promise for potentially reducing maternal morbidity and mortality rates especially among BIPOC communities. Doula support women and their families in the birthing and postpartum period with culturally appropriate care; one in four maternal deaths occurs in African American women.
- SB 5765 Concerning the practice of Midwifery. Expands the scope of practice for licensed midwives to be able under a limited prescriptive license extension to include medical devices and implants for women. Additional training and supervision are required. Here again is a workforce related bill potentially bridging the gap in health care for disenfranchised groups.

Legislation Reducing Financial Barriers:

- HB 1616 Charity Care Increases income thresholds for patients to receive charity care for hospital visits by hospital size and type and based on the federal poverty index (FPI) adjusted by family size. The bill also limits what assets the hospital may consider in determining FPI. In effect, according to the Washington AG's office, this bill has the potential of eliminating 50% of hospital bills for Washingtonians.

Legislative Health care Priorities for the 2023 Session

- Provide access to affordable health services with quality standards of care, necessary workforce to meet health care needs, and assurance of individual freedom in care choices
- Support legislation that would implement single payer and/or universal health care.

Likely Legislation Projections

Protection of individual choices in healthcare: New legislation for 2023 related to reproductive rights may include: protection of personal data and individuals as well as health care providers from legal attacks, a substantial funding package request for abortion related services and a request for a constitutional amendment.

Two bills the League supported in 2022 related to health care choices are poised to be re-introduced:

- 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 1141 Increasing access to the Death with Dignity Act. Makes changes to the 2009 Death with Dignity Act, changes 'physician' to 'qualified medical provider.' Eliminates the 15-day waiting

period and reduces it to 72 hours. There was opposition to this bill by the differently abled coalition.

Universal Health care and progress in accessibility: The Universal Health Care Commission submitted their baseline report to the legislature on November 1. They will now move into designing a health care system for Washington. Assurances have been made by the Commission to heed the successes and failures of other state models in their future work.

Other bills supported by the League which did not move forward related to accessibility may be re-introduced after retooling and new sponsors. These include:

- SB 5142 Establishing the profession of Dental Therapist. 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. The League has been supporting this bill for years. Representative Cody chaired a study session on the bill.
- 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.

Coalitions: Health Care is a Human Right Coalition-WA: www.healthcareisarithwa.org
Children's Alliance: www.childrensalliance

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