

Report of the Task Force on 2024 Legislative Session
To: House of Delegates
September 2024

At the 2017 House of Delegates, Resolution HD-11-2017-Enhancing the Association's Legislative and Regulatory Advocacy, was adopted to create a Legislative Session Task Force (Task Force) to strengthen the Association's advocacy efforts.

Task Force members are nominated and approved by the Board of Directors no later than August 31 of the year prior to the start of the upcoming legislative session. Each year the Task Force dissolves after completion of its assigned legislative session (and subsequent special sessions) and after it has provided recommendations to the Board of Directors for the Association's legislative agenda for the following legislative session. The Board of Directors has broad flexibility to determine the size and scope of the Task Force each year based on anticipated legislative issues. Each year, the Chair of the Task Force is nominated and approved by the Board of Directors. Task Force members are expected to participate in the regularly scheduled meetings; review and provide recommendations regarding legislation; and, potentially, testify at legislative hearings and/or meet with lawmakers as assigned.

The Task Force is charged with preparations for each legislative session, making recommendations to the Board of Directors related to the Association's legislative agenda, and making recommendations on how to proceed on legislative issues with which the Board has decision-making authority. Additionally, the Task Force determines (in accordance with the Association's legislative agenda, House Resolutions, precedence, and any other guiding documents) what position the Association shall take on legislation pending before the Legislature and what advocacy strategy should be employed.

For the 2024 legislative session, the Board of Directors appointed the following eleven individuals as members of the Task Force:

Dr. Brianne Butler
Dr. Stephen Davis
Dr. Brittany Dean
Dr. Christopher Delecki
Dr. Christopher Dorow
Dr. John Gibbons
Dr. Joseph de Jesus
Dr. Bernard Larson
Dr. Aimi Mizutani
Dr. Kim Nordberg
Dr. Cynthia Pauley, Chair
Dr. Amy Winston

The guidance and expertise provided by the Task Force during the 2024 legislative session was invaluable to the Association's advocacy efforts. The Legislature returned to an in-person format, with some aspects of the previous remote/hybrid sessions continuing, including remote public testimony. The Task Force weighed-in on legislation related to dental benefits, dental workforce, business and employer issues,

and several other important topics. For more information on the legislative issues tracked by the Task Force, please review the 2024 Legislative Session Summary attached as Appendix A.

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APPENDIX A



2024 Legislative Session Summary

Washington state's 60-day legislative session adjourned on Thursday March 7, 2024. Occurring in even-numbered years, the shorter session is the second half of the biennium. This year, the Legislature operated in an in-person format, allowing remote public testimony.

WSDA advocated in support of as well as in opposition to several bills this session concerning dental-related issues, workforce, insurance, small business issues, employer/employee matters, and much more. The following is a summary of legislation that may impact you as a provider, business owner, or employee.

Legislation Summarized

Insurance-Related Legislation

- Out-of-network Reimbursement Parity for Dental Providers
- Requiring Inflationary Adjustments in Provider/Carrier Contracts
- Establishing a Dental Loss Ratio
- Requiring Transparency in Network Leasing

Health Care & Workforce-Related Legislation

- Creating a Preventive Dental Assistant
- Establishing the Health Care Cost Transparency Board
- Modifying Licensure Fees for the Washington Physician Health Program
- Allowing Individuals to Receive Professional Licenses Regardless of Immigration or Citizenship Status

Business-Related Legislation

- Regulating Lighting Fixtures in Businesses
- Workers' Compensation Incentives to Return to Work
- Creating a State AI Task Force

Operating Budget Highlights

- Regional Initiatives in Dental Education (RIDE) Program
- Access to Baby and Child Dentistry Program
- Eastern Washington University Dental Therapy Education Program
- Washington Department of Corrections Mobile Dental Unit
- Supporting Access to Water Fluoridation

Capital Budget Highlights

- Pacific Northwest University and Yakima Neighborhood Health Services Dental Clinic
- Community Health Association of Spokane
- Community Health Center of Snohomish County)
- Moses Lake Community Health Center Lake

2024 Session Highlights – Insurance-Related Legislation

➤ Out-of-network Reimbursement Parity for Dental Providers ([Senate Bill 6307](#))

WSDA was happy to introduce for the first time Senate Bill 6307, which would require reimbursement parity whether a dental provider is in or out of network with a dental benefits carrier. As Senate Bill 6307 was introduced later in the session, it did not receive a hearing, and WSDA will be working over the interim in preparation for the long legislative session in 2025.

➤ Requiring Annual Inflationary Adjustments in Provider/Carrier Contracts ([House Bill 1655](#))

First introduced in the 2023 legislative session, WSDA worked as part of a coalition advocating for the passage of House Bill 1655, which would have required inflationary adjustments to provider/carrier contracts for providers not affiliated with a hospital, such as dental providers. House Bill 1655 received a public hearing January 30, 2024, after which it moved to the House fiscal committee. WSDA was disappointed to see that dental was removed from the original bill due to a miscommunication, and the bill did not move forward this session.

➤ Establishing a Dental Loss Ratio ([Senate Bill 6218](#))

WSDA was pleased to introduce Senate Bill 6218 this past session, which would have established an 83% dental loss ratio. While Washingtonians benefit from a medical loss ratio in Affordable Care Act plans, there is no required dental loss ratio. Senate Bill 6218 would have required 83 cents of every patient premium dollar spent in Washington to be paid out in Washington patient care. If dental benefits companies were to fall below the established ratio, Washington patients would have received the difference in the form of a payout.

Senate Bill 6218 received a public hearing on January 25, 2024. Unfortunately, due to opposition from insurance and other groups, this bill did not move forward this session.

➤ Requiring Transparency in Network Leasing ([Senate Bill 6097](#))

This session, WSDA worked in collaboration with the Association of Dental Support Organizations to introduce Senate Bill 6097, which would require providers to “opt-in” to any material amendment, for example a leased network, to a contract in order for the change to be effective. This legislation would have brought transparency both to provider contracts as well as patient benefits.

Senate Bill 6097 received a public hearing on January 19, 2024; however, due to the insurance laws in Washington, the Office of the Insurance Commissioner had concerns with the implementation of this bill and in a short session, this bill did not move forward.

2024 Session Highlights – Health Care & Workforce-Related Legislation

➤ Creating a Preventive Dental Assistant Hygienists ([House Bill 2176](#))

As Washington is facing an extreme shortage of dental hygienists in our state, WSDA introduced legislation this past session that would have created a “Preventive Dental Assistant” license, empowering dental assistants to obtain additional training to be able to provide basic preventive care. Under the bill language, all applicants would need to complete training and demonstrate competency as determined by the Dental Quality Assurance Commission in order to become licensed. Similar models are successfully in place in the Army National Guard, Indian Health Service, and Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium.

While HB 2176 received a hearing in the House Health Care and Wellness Committee on January 16, 2024, ultimately the bill did not move forward.

➤ Establishing the Health Care Cost Transparency Board ([House Bill 1508](#))

The Health Care Cost Transparency Board (Transparency Board) was originally established in 2020 to analyze total health care expenditures in Washington, identify trends in health care cost growth, and

establish a health care cost growth benchmark. Among other requirements, when analyzing the impacts of cost drivers on health care House Bill 1508 now allows the Transparency Board to consider the financial earnings of health care providers and payers, including information regarding profits, assets, accumulated surpluses, reserves, and investment income.

Additionally, the bill requires that by December 1 of each year, the Transparency Board must hold a public hearing related to the growth in total health care expenditures in relation to the health care cost growth benchmark of the previous year. The hearing will include the identification of any payers or health care providers that exceeded the health care cost growth benchmark, and the Transparency Board may require payers or health care providers that have substantially exceeded the health care cost growth benchmark in the prior year to testify regarding the reasons for the excess health care cost growth as well as measures being taken to stay within the limits of the health care cost growth benchmark in the future.

➤ Modifying Licensure Fees for the Washington Physician Health Program ([House Bill 1972](#))

The Washington Physician Health Program (WPHP) advocated for legislation this session that would increase the licensing surcharge from \$50 to \$70, to assist WPHP with increasing costs. This license surcharge increase applies to a variety of medical providers, including physicians, osteopathic physicians, podiatric physicians, dentists, and physician assistants. For dentists, the implementation of this fee increase is delayed until January 1, 2026.

➤ Allowing Individuals to Receive Professional Licenses Regardless of Immigration or Citizenship Status ([House Bill 1889](#))

House Bill 1889 allows individuals, regardless of immigration or citizenship status, to apply for and receive professional licenses, including, among other licensing types, both dental and dental hygiene licenses.

2024 Session Highlights – Business-Related Legislation

➤ Regulating Lighting Fixtures in Businesses ([HB 1185](#))

House Bill 1185 bans a retailer, manufacturer, or wholesaler from selling a compact fluorescent lamp or linear fluorescent lamp beginning January 1, 2029. The legislation includes an exemption for "...lamps designed and marketed exclusively for use in medical or veterinary diagnosis or treatment, or in a medical device." However, other spaces within dental offices may be impacted by this bill. While this legislation does not require offices take immediate action, it will be a consideration for offices replacing lights following the January 1, 2029 implementation date.

➤ Workers' Compensation Incentives to Return to Work ([House Bill 2127](#))

House Bill 2127, which was agency request legislation from the Department of Labor and Industries, increases the reimbursement amounts that can be paid to employers participating in the Stay at Work Program. Among other provisions, the legislation also increases the maximum amount that L&I may pay to assist with an employer's modification of an worker's job to \$10,000.

➤ Creating a State AI Task Force ([Senate Bill 5838](#))

In response to the continuous development of the capabilities of artificial intelligence, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 5838, creating a task force to assess the current AI uses and trends by private and public sector entities and make recommendations to the Legislature regarding standards for the use and regulation of AI. The task force is run by an Executive Committee, and WSDA successfully advocated for the inclusion of a health care subcommittee to ensure dental and other health care interests are represented within the task force.

2023-25 Supplemental Operating Budget Highlights

Below are budget items of note that were included in the 2023-25 Supplemental Operating Budget.

The Regional Initiatives in Dental Education (RIDE) Program – \$2.5 million

WSDA was pleased to see funding to enhance the RIDE program included in the Supplemental Operating Budget. This funding will be used to increase the number of DDS students trained from 32 to 64, and add a second year of curriculum to the educational program in Spokane by securing a centralized space to support a Regional Simulation Training lab and interprofessional programming.

Access to Baby and Child Dentistry Program– \$1 million

This session, the Legislature appropriated a total of \$1 million in funding for the purpose of maintaining and expanding capacity for local ABCD program coordinators.

Eastern Washington University Dental Therapy Education Program– \$127,000

Eastern Washington University will receive \$127,000 in funding to develop a postbaccalaureate dental therapy certificate in the College of Health Science and Public Health.

Supporting Access to Water Fluoridation– \$100,000

Although roughly 73% of Americans enjoy the oral health benefits of fluoridated drinking water, in Washington, only 56% of residents have access to fluoridation. In 2023, the Legislature passed [House Bill 1251](#), which expanded on previous efforts to expand community water fluoridation by requiring for public water systems to notify its customers.

This session, WSDA advocated for funding to convene a workgroup on oral health equity with the purpose of reviewing the findings from the Department of Health's Oral Health Equity Assessment, identifying communities in Washington experiencing the greatest oral health disparities as well as communities that should be prioritized for outreach and community water fluoridation efforts, and developing recommendations for how to partner with communities to address oral health disparities and provide education about community water fluoridation and other oral health measures. The work group will be composed of several stakeholders, including representatives from community-based organizations, dental providers, medical providers, federally qualified health centers, tribal dental clinics, oral health foundations, and public health and water systems. This workgroup is required to report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature by June 30, 2025.

Washington Department of Corrections Mobile Dental Unit – \$1 million

The Department of Corrections will receive \$1 million to fund a mobile dental unit vehicle to provide dental services to each of the standalone minimum camps for the Department of Corrections. This funding is intended to cover staffing costs as well.

2023-25 Supplemental Capital Budget Highlights

Below are budget items of note that were included in the 2023-25 Supplemental Capital Budget.

Dental Capacity Grant: Yakima Dental Clinic – \$4.4 million

WSDA was pleased to see funding awarded to Yakima Neighborhood Health Services (YNHS) with the purpose of collaborating with the Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences (PNWU) School of Dental Medicine to train second-, third-, and fourth-year dental students recruited from rural and underserved communities. To accomplish this, this funding will be used to build and equip PNWU's Student Learning Collaborative (SLC) Building, adjacent to its Terrace Heights medical clinic and located 1.5 miles from the PNWU campus. The PNWU dental program will be in partnership with three Federally Qualified Health Centers, placing students in rural and underserved community settings after the first year of instruction. The 80K-square-foot SLC building will bring together several of PNWU's health sciences programs, including the

dental program. The building will be equipped with expansive medical simulation spaces, active learning classrooms, enhanced study and gathering areas, sustainable building technology, and serve as a hub for PNWU's healthcare community.

Dental Capacity Grant: Community Health Association of Spokane – \$80,000

The Community Health Association of Spokane will receive funding which will allow them to serve an additional 2,160 additional patients.

Dental Capacity Grant: Community Health Center of Snohomish County – \$300,000

The Community Health Center of Snohomish County will receive funding that will allow them to serve an additional 1,500 patients.

Dental Capacity Grant: Moses Lake Community Health Center – \$72,000

The Moses Lake Community Health Center will receive funding that will allow them to expand services to an additional 300 patients.