



Washington State Department of

*Health*

# FORWARD

The next phase of WA's  
COVID-19 Response  
(through 2022)



Over the last two years, the world has been shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic and sadly, countless lives have been lost. Wide-scale orders for sheltering in place, business closures or occupancy limits, distance learning, social distancing for people of all ages and many other hardships were a source of stress and adversity to individuals, families and businesses across Washington.

Despite the trauma an ever-changing novel virus had on the lives of Washingtonians, our communities came together showing incredible resilience in adapting to changing guidance and interventions as the science evolved surrounding COVID-19. Though each of our human experiences dealing with COVID-19 varied, neighbors and community members across our state showed concern for one another — inspired by hope and fueled by action.

The Washington State Department of Health, guided by its pillars of **Equity, Innovation and Engagement** (EIE), recognized that community was going to be essential to achieving vaccine equity and increasing vaccine confidence. At the height of the COVID-19 battle, DOH launched the **Care Connect program** to help support individuals and families during isolation and quarantine so they could remain home to take care of their health and protect their communities. To date, Care Connect has provided supports like food and care kits or housing assistance to more than approximately **100,000** residents.

During the crucial campaign to vaccinate as many residents as quickly and equitably as possible, DOH launched a grassroots community-led vaccination effort called **'Care-a-Van'**. Though there have been over 13 million total doses of COVID-19 vaccine administered across the state, partnering with communities in vaccination efforts has been key.

Through Care-a-Van, community organizations across the state continue to have the ability to request and lead a COVID vaccination event. In a short time, this effort has supported over 700 community-led events, with over 70% of vaccines delivered to communities with a **Social Vulnerability Index** of 7 or higher. By engaging and partnering with Tribes, Washington State agencies, community and faith-based organizations, etc., we can meet communities where they are, in locations they are familiar with and supported by individuals they trust.





We all came together to support each other during trying times, following guidance for masking, social distancing and the promise of a better tomorrow through vaccinations. The incredible work done by public health, the healthcare system, community partners and individual Washingtonians led to our state having one of the lowest cumulative case and death rates, and highest state vaccination rates, in the country. However, there is still much work that remains. COVID-19 has exacerbated many health inequities — both physical and mental health-related. We know we can overcome all these if we unite as one.

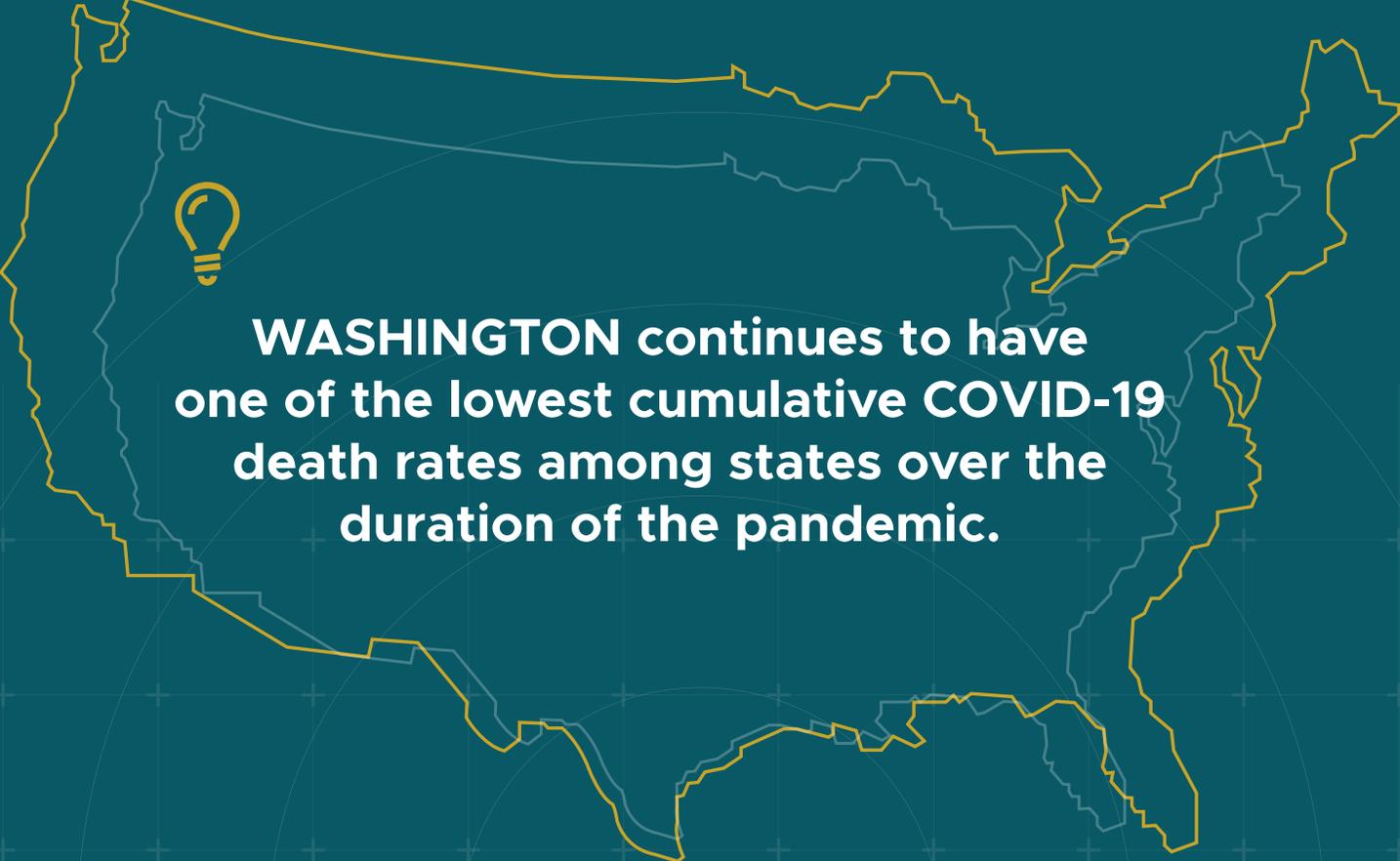


Engagement across the state ecosystem was central; each system was and still is doing what it can to help reduce the spread of the virus. While fighting on the frontlines against this virus, healthcare workers continue to be as essential as ever – not only in their effort to care for those battling COVID-19, but to educate and communicate. DOH recognized that healthcare providers are trusted sources of medical information and play a critical role in increasing vaccinations, thus launching the [POP Initiative](#) – Power of Providers (POP).

Through POP, we asked providers to reach out to patients, educate them, provide them with a vaccine or referral and empower patients to share vaccination status with their respective communities. Over 65,000 Washington healthcare providers committed to do so and that number continues to grow.

While the virus remains with us and is expected to circulate for the foreseeable future, individual Washingtonians, families, businesses, the fabric of our social support system continue to deal with the toll of COVID-19 and will take years to recover. Now is the time we move forward as a community with a long-term sustainable framework to co-exist with COVID-19 as part of our foreseeable future, while continuing to keep each other safe and as we continue to prepare and monitor for any future COVID-19 variants.

Guided by science, we will move **ForWARD** together as a state to the next phase of the pandemic with attention to both hope and healing — for families, for communities, for businesses, for WA. As we embark on the road ahead together, DOH commits to leading the following **three** priority areas with **seven** commitments, to help Washington families, businesses and communities move forward safely and with the tools to protect their health.



**WASHINGTON** continues to have one of the lowest cumulative COVID-19 death rates among states over the duration of the pandemic.

**10 states with lowest cumulative death rates per 100K since the start of the pandemic:**

- 1. VERMONT**
- 2. HAWAII**
- 3. UTAH**
- 4. ALASKA**
- 5. MAINE/WASHINGTON**
- 7. OREGON**
- 8. NEW HAMPSHIRE**
- 9. COLORADO**
- 10. NEBRASKA**

# Priority Areas Moving

*FOR***WARD** 

***1. ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT***

***2. PREVENTION, TOOLS AND ACCESS***

***3. SYSTEM READINESS,  
SUPPORT AND CAPACITY***



# ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT



## Engage, Educate and Empower:

We will engage with a variety of partners, stakeholders and most importantly Washingtonians in a community-first approach to provide health information, guidance and resources to individuals, schools, childcare centers, businesses and a myriad of organizations. Using these tools, they can take the necessary steps to stay healthy and safe. We will further increase the resilience of organizations and communities across the state, solicit community input through engagement and continue the process of recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Washingtonians have come together to protect the health of their families, neighbors, and communities over the past two years. By continuing to work together, we can both stay safer and support healing and recovery.

## Commitment:

We will continue to monitor science, the latest information and key data, to inform our ongoing COVID-19 health guidance and communications. We commit to releasing updated information quickly and in an equitable and culturally responsive way in our fight against COVID-19 regardless of how things progress over time. Our main priority continues to be the health and safety of Washingtonians.



# PREVENTION, TOOLS, AND ACCESS



## Vaccines:

Vaccines are the most powerful tools available to prevent serious illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19. They are safe and effective. Both primary vaccinations and boosters for adults and children alike afford protections against COVID-19 and new variants of concern.

The goal will remain to make COVID-19 vaccines available and accessible to all Washingtonians no matter where they live or who they are, with a particular focus on addressing any equity gaps that may be present. DOH adopted [8 vaccine equity strategies](#) that have served as the foundation for all COVID-19 vaccine implementation efforts to ensure equitable access for Washingtonians most impacted by COVID-19. We will continue our community-driven initiatives, outreach and education, training and support for health care providers and our mobile vaccination efforts. We will continue to monitor overall vaccination coverage rates as well as rates among people at increased risk for severe illness.

## Commitment:

We will support vaccination efforts throughout the state and maintain the system-wide capacity to administer 30,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine per day and the ability to surge to 60,000 doses daily within seven days as needed.



As of March, over 13.1 million doses of vaccine have been administered to over 5.8 million Washington residents.



# PREVENTION, TOOLS, AND ACCESS



## Testing:

DOH has already delivered over **8 million** at-home tests across the state to schools, local public health partners, Tribes, community-based organizations, and individual households. The availability and accessibility of community testing, as well as at-home testing, is a critical component of our path forward. Our goal will be to assure continued equitable access to tests (whether PCR or rapid) for Washingtonians through a variety of channels in partnership with local public health, healthcare, Tribes, and community-based organizations. This will include continuing to leverage the state's [Say Yes! To COVID Test](#) initiative. The main strategies for testing will include a focus on individuals who may otherwise not be able to access tests, while making tests more broadly available so people can protect themselves and those around them as they thrive in their daily lives beyond the pandemic. We aim to empower Washingtonians to know when to test and what to do with the test results.

## Commitment:

We will monitor testing accessibility across the state and expand testing availability when testing appointments are unavailable and/or delayed. We will be prepared, if necessary, to surge to a COVID-19 testing capacity that allows us to provide over 50,000 tests per day over the next six months.



# PREVENTION, TOOLS, AND ACCESS



## Masks:

We will ensure there is an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) on hand for distribution to health care, local public health and Tribes. Our state inventory of masks and other medical PPE will be there to augment community needs, including distribution to local governments for frontline workers in high-risk settings, schools and the public, as well as ensure readiness of the healthcare system. We will be ready to make masks and other materials available to those most at risk for severe disease and/or to those responding to COVID-19 to protect Washingtonians.

## Commitment:

We will monitor ongoing supply chain constraints and have a ready supply of at least 7.5 million high-quality masks available for expedited distribution to support communities and partners should the need arise at any time. We will also maintain a 60-day supply of PPE to support the healthcare system in case of a surge and/or supply chain constraints.



**Total  
high-quality  
masks  
distributed  
in WA:  
109,822,675**



# SYSTEM READINESS, SUPPORT, AND CAPACITY



## **Data Monitoring and Disease Detection:**

Washington State's genomic sequencing for COVID-19 is one of the most robust in the nation. In an effort to prepare communities for any changes in our current response, we will monitor necessary data and use available tools to detect any changes in conditions that may signal a need for a different level of response to COVID-19. This shall include data for monitoring outbreaks, community transmission, and health care system capacity. This will be complemented by robust laboratory genotyping and disease detection efforts in ongoing monitoring for new variants of concern as well as the use of emerging strategies such as wastewater surveillance. The tireless efforts made by those in labs will undoubtedly lead to a stronger community defense in the future as we continue to learn and grow together. We will work with partners at the local, state and federal levels to maintain a comprehensive view of disease transmission trends in the state.

## **Commitment:**

We will support genotyping of up to 10% of COVID-19 cases and employ key disease detection efforts, such as wastewater surveillance, to gauge ongoing COVID-19 transmission trends in the community across Washington as necessary.



# SYSTEM READINESS, SUPPORT, AND CAPACITY



## Health System Capacity:

We will use a variety of tools to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the health system throughout the state. Understanding the strain on the system helps us also better understand the strain on the workforce, which has worked tirelessly during this pandemic to ensure the care of patients. Our ongoing efforts will include supporting response and workforce resiliency efforts across the public health and health care systems through multi-agency coordination at the local, state and federal levels. We will maintain our ability to provide medical materials such as ventilators, hospital beds and other medical equipment during times of need in conjunction with the federal strategic national stockpile and other initiatives as necessary. Keeping our healthcare workers safe and prepared unlocks a greater capacity to care for all Washingtonians, through COVID-19 response and other health needs of the community.

## Commitment:

We will maintain visibility for health care capacity in the state in partnership with the *Washington Medical Coordination Center (WMCC)* and other health care coalitions to understand ongoing system needs and to provide needed support across Washington as necessary.



# SYSTEM READINESS, SUPPORT, AND CAPACITY



## **Treatments and therapeutics:**

We will monitor the supply of current and new COVID-19 therapeutics including antivirals and monoclonal antibodies to advance Washington’s ongoing strategy for preventing and treating COVID-19. We will ensure Washingtonians have access to the therapeutics shown to be effective against current and emerging variants based on the latest science and availability of FDA-authorized therapeutics, and that healthcare providers have the knowledge and resources to prescribe them effectively. We will embrace emerging models for the delivery of therapeutics that hold promise for improving access across Washington state.

## **Commitment:**

We will take an equitable approach to the distribution of COVID-19 treatments and, during supply constraints, give a higher priority to areas and/or groups with higher disease burden and/or reduced access. Reaching community members where they are located is of utmost importance to DOH.

# MOVING FORWARD

As we forge on a path of coexisting with COVID-19, we must remember it is difficult to predict when the pandemic will truly end. We will continue with a path of recovery, resilience and hope for the future while encouraging people to do what they can to keep themselves and their communities safe. We will persist in our efforts to empower organizations and businesses to set the standards they need to keep their staff and customers safe, ensuring collectively we protect those who are most vulnerable and each other. We must leverage our newer strategies to be as strong as possible in the future

Under the leadership of Governor Inslee, following the known science and data, we saved tens of thousands of lives throughout the pandemic. Washington State led the way through creativity, teamwork and constant pivots. **Over 80%** of the eligible population in our state have initiated vaccination, meaning that they have received at least the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. The [“Say Yes! COVID Test”](#) portal led to the distribution of almost **3 million** at-home test kits across Washington, often delivered overnight, in partnership with Amazon and Care Evolution.

In this same vein, we will continue to adapt to modern and innovative ways to monitor disease, promote new technologies and to deliver information, such as [WA Notify](#) and our education campaign. Through WA Notify, over **3.1 million** Washington mobile phone users activated the exposure notification app. Our COVID-19 health education campaign had over **1 billion** touchpoints, with information delivered in up to **42 different languages**. We will also sustain and build upon the unique public-private partnerships that developed over the course of the pandemic, which includes the nationally recognized [Vaccine Action Command and Coordination System](#) (VACCS).

VACCS Center created public-private partnerships infusing the talent and resources of the private sector in support of the state in achieving the initial goal of administering 45,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses a day in the safest, fastest and most equitable manner. VACCS partners also helped support our vaccine call center, modernize our [data dashboard](#), deliver masks and so much more.



We will strengthen and expand community initiatives that have helped better serve Washingtonians while simultaneously addressing equity gaps. The [Vaccine Implementation Collaborative](#) was formed to help support effective and equitable vaccine access strategies that centered on the voices of people and communities most impacted by COVID-19. This ongoing effort involved a collaboration between **over 600 community organizations** seeking to address equitable vaccine distribution and access as well as advances in pandemic recovery efforts in communities most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

We will continue to invest in communities and to incorporate health equity within our community engagement COVID-19 funding initiatives. Through the Community-Driven Outreach Program, we will continue to support community organizations to ensure that Washington communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 have equitable access to information, vaccines, and services. Community-rooted organizations are better positioned to respond to community needs and have a unique understanding of the importance of a trauma-informed approach, cultural beliefs, risk perceptions, and norms that impact vaccine confidence in their communities.

# MOVING FORWARD

We have learned during this pandemic that community organizations are a critical component of the larger public health ecosystem and that investing in sustainable community infrastructure to address structural and systemic inequities amplified by the pandemic is key to an equitable preparedness response and recovery. The mental, behavioral and emotional tolls from this pandemic are real. Looking ahead, we are committed to leading and backing initiatives that support not just physical health but optimize mental health and overall well-being as well.

We acknowledge no plan would be complete without mentioning the numerous additional elements that go into achieving success moving ahead.

This includes supporting ongoing strategies for fighting misinformation, supporting the connection between global and domestic health work especially for vaccine equity, advocating for healthier environments including ventilation, incorporating newer strategies for response from elsewhere, investing in public health and the well-being of communities - and the list goes on.

As we release this plan, we continue to pay attention to these other elements as well to help assure our state's success as we move forward together.

We will continue to honor our responsibility to Tribes and Urban Indian Health organizations across the state through our commitment to formal consultation and collaboration for all future response decisions and opportunities that may impact Tribal and Urban Indian populations.

**Critical to a brighter future will be infusing our core values of equity, innovation and engagement into how we transform and deliver services, go about our activities and strengthen our ongoing work. In the process, strongly and resolutely, we believe this is how we move forward together as a state – WA Forward.**

This plan will be updated and revisited as needed.

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# FORWARD

