

THE TRANSFORMATIONAL NATURE OF THE HEAL ACT

The passage of the [Healthy Environment for All \(HEAL\) Act](#) in 2021 is a historic step toward eliminating environmental health disparities and more equitably distributing health and environmental benefits among communities of color and low-income households. It is the first law in Washington to create a coordinated state agency approach to environmental justice (EJ). The law covers seven state agencies: the Washington State Department of Health (DOH); the state departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Ecology, Natural Resources and Transportation; and the Puget Sound Partnership. It allows other agencies to opt in to complying with the obligations of the law. Under the HEAL Act agencies must: incorporate EJ into their strategic plans, adopt community engagement plans, conduct EJAs on specific agency actions, incorporate EJ into budgeting and funding decisions, and offer Tribal consultation on these obligations. For more information and continued updates on HEAL Act implementation, see the [DOH Environmental Justice webpage](#).



HEAL ACT UPDATES

Since the HEAL Act was enacted, agencies have created an interagency workgroup (IWG) to work with the [Environmental Justice Council \(EJC\)](#). The HEAL Act centers public accountability and transparency. It directs agencies to [engage communities](#) and [offer tribal consultation](#) on key HEAL activities.

In July 2022, IWG agencies released [a draft community engagement framework](#). The IWG will update it with guidance from the EJ Council, broader community guidance, and direction from tribes through the consultation process over the next year. By July 2023, agencies will develop and pilot an environmental justice assessment (EJA) process for significant agency actions (SAAs) and use EJ principles in agency budgeting and funding decisions.

In addition to the five implementation areas above, the HEAL Act requires specific work by DOH to update and maintain the [Environmental Health Disparities \(EHD\) Map](#). The EHD map is a cumulative impacts analysis tool. It identifies environmental health disparities across Washington. We released [Version 2.0 of the EHD Map](#) in August 2022. Over the next year, the DOH will offer tribal consultation on the map and make necessary updates.

The intent of the HEAL Act is to transform agency culture, policy, and practice around EJ and set the foundation for future actions to further EJ in Washington. Implementation of the HEAL Act is deeply aligned with DOH's [Transformational Plan](#) through our vision, and our commitment to equity, innovation, and engagement. To fulfill the HEAL act, we will work on strategies across three of the five key priorities in the Transformational Plan: Health and Wellness, Environmental Health and Health Systems, and Work Force Transformation. We believe our work will affect the strategies in the other two priorities too.



“RIPPLE EFFECTS” OF THE HEAL ACT

The HEAL Act is already causing systems-level change at DOH. It exists as part of a larger ecosystem of transformational state equity initiatives, including [the Governor’s Pro-Equity and Anti-Racism \(PEAR\) Plan](#) and others, and is a featured initiative under Priority III Environmental Health in the [DOH Transformational Plan](#). Here are examples of how the HEAL Act supports changes in action:



Innovative and Technologically Supported

The [EHD Map](#) makes visible the impacts of multiple forms of environmental pollution. It highlights areas of environmental health disparity in Washington. DOH will update the map regularly with guidance from community, tribes, and the EJC.



Community Centered with Humility

Co-creation of the [Environmental Justice Community Participation Fund grant](#) with a community advisory committee shifts decision-making power to community. It centers the lived experience and perspectives of people living in communities most affected by environmental harms.



Visible, Valued, and Validated

Targeted outreach and engagement with tribes around the HEAL Act supports visibility and accountability to tribal partners. It helps before, during and outside of the formal consultation process. This includes biannual, Interagency Workgroup-hosted Tribal Briefings, quarterly email updates, and DOH staff attendance at tribal public health events and conferences.



Equity Driven

Equity is at the heart of the HEAL Act, which codifies a definition of EJ. It centers the meaningful involvement and equitable distribution of resources and environmental benefits. It helps eliminate harm for communities most impacted by environmental pollution.



Collaborative in Engagement

Through the work on the community engagement and tribal consultation obligations of HEAL, staff identified and are addressing gaps in policy, systems, and infrastructure to support equitable community engagement. This includes community compensation and language access, as well as outreach and engagement with tribes in complement to offering formal consultation.

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