

# BIENNIAL REPORT

## SKAGIT COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

2019-20



To the Skagit Community,



With a year like 2020 just recently put to rest, it is hard to remember all of the amazing work that Skagit County Public Health accomplished in 2019! Even still, in compiling this report, I was heartened by the incredible achievements by our team over the course of the past two years! Though COVID-19 has overshadowed many things, our department's strength shines especially bright when I stop to recognize our staff's immense abilities to adapt to and overcome significant challenges.

We began 2020 with great enthusiasm and a focus on our primary goals, including expanding our role as Chief Health Strategist, addressing social determinants of health, and promoting health equity. Detailed plans were in play to deepen our community partnerships, further Skagit's opioid action, and advance local efforts to increase affordable housing and reduce homelessness. We were ready!

But 2020 had different plans. To respond to COVID-19, Public Health adapted, re-focused, duct-taped, and outright transformed much of the way we served our community. Our work shifted quickly to coordinating a large-scale emergency response. We intensified and greatly expanded disease investigation, launched housing supports for people struggling with isolation and quarantine, increased multilingual and culturally responsive services, and—almost overnight—created a drive-through COVID-19 Test Site.

Public Health was able to respond to COVID-19 and achieve critical results only through the generous dedication and decisive action of a range of community partners. While these partnerships may be too great in number to list here, many can be found sprinkled throughout this report. It was because of this dedication by our partners that Public Health managed to meet our goals laid out back in 2019 and continue to strive forward in 2020 despite the immense challenges posed by COVID-19.

Thank you, Skagit, for all that you do, and for continually showing your resilient spirit.

*"Public Health has the unique opportunity to impact the lives of each and every Skagitonian. This is an opportunity—a responsibility—that we take very seriously. Public Health has been here for its residents through dark days, and we will continue to be here as we enter into the next phase of this COVID journey."*

– Jennifer Johnson

Thank you for working with us, today and in the future.

In good health,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Johnson".

Jennifer Johnson, Director of Skagit County Public Health

**Our Mission** Skagit is a leader in convening partners to prevent disease, promote wellness, and protect the health of our community.

**Our Vision** A thriving, collaborative, and cohesive community where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full health potential.

**STATE AND LOCAL** health departments are changing the way they approach their work to address the growing needs of their communities. As we continue our role as **Chief Health Strategist** in the 21st century, it is imperative to maintain the core foundational public health functions embedded in **Environmental Health, Emergency Preparedness & Response, Maternal & Child Health, Communicable Disease and Vital Records**. In this role, we have refocused our service delivery on population rather than individual health. Emphasizing **population health** means recognizing that health is the result of **access to quality healthcare, healthy natural environments, opportunities for work in a healthy workplace, access to good nutrition, easily accessible places to recreate, and of course, a roof over our heads**. Public Health strives every day to help ensure that Skagitonians are safe and healthy where they work, go to school, live, and play.

## Skagit County Public Health Strategic Plan 2018/20: Goals & Objectives

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLECTIVE IMPACT	COMMUNICATIONS & MESSAGING	LIFESPAN HEALTH	SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH
<p><b>OUTCOME OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve alignment and collective impact practices</li> <li>• Expand efforts to engage and inform policy-makers</li> <li>• Build trusted relationships throughout the community</li> </ul> <p><b>STRATEGY OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate health goals and policy agendas with partner organizations</li> <li>• Actively seek/use community voice in creative ways</li> <li>• Identify and engage diverse partners</li> </ul>	<p><b>OUTCOME OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve delivery of information for health promotion and disease prevention</li> <li>• Increase awareness of public health priorities and accomplishments</li> </ul> <p><b>STRATEGY OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand reach of key health messages</li> <li>• Improve customer feedback processes</li> <li>• Create language and messaging that supports health equity</li> <li>• Use data and stories to help communities understand health and wellness</li> </ul>	<p><b>OUTCOME OBJECTIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve programs and care across the lifespan</li> </ul> <p><b>STRATEGY OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase programs that support social and emotional wellness</li> <li>• Increase promotion of healthy eating and active living</li> <li>• Enhance access to clinical and community services</li> <li>• Expand behavioral health programs and transition services for incarcerated individuals</li> </ul>	<p><b>OUTCOME OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a recovery-oriented system of care</li> <li>• Improve housing opportunities and support</li> <li>• Increase capacity of our community providers</li> </ul> <p><b>STRATEGY OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build capacity and emphasis on recovery</li> <li>• Increase access to affordable permanent housing solutions</li> <li>• Expand recovery housing</li> <li>• Increase community understanding of housing as a social determinant of health</li> </ul>
HEALTH PROTECTION	DATA, ASSESSMENTS & EVALUATION	ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH & GROWTH	
<p><b>OUTCOME OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand communicable disease prevention efforts</li> <li>• Reduce risks from environmental exposures and public health emergencies</li> <li>• Reduce opioid-related deaths</li> </ul> <p><b>STRATEGY OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase use of evidence-based strategies to overcome barriers to immunization</li> <li>• Increase use of education and technical assistance to achieve regulatory compliance</li> <li>• Implement policies to promote and protect health</li> <li>• Develop, lead, and implement opioid solutions for individuals of all ages</li> </ul>	<p><b>OUTCOME OBJECTIVE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve data assessment and program evaluation</li> </ul> <p><b>STRATEGY OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the use of data in departmental decision-making</li> <li>• Build capacity and framework for evaluation</li> <li>• Enhance community health assessment and planning processes</li> <li>• Improve monitoring of emerging public health issues</li> </ul>	<p><b>OUTCOME OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the quality and efficiency of operations</li> <li>• Strengthen internal collaboration</li> <li>• Enhance workforce capabilities</li> </ul> <p><b>STRATEGY OBJECTIVES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardize departmental processes and procedures</li> <li>• Improve customer service</li> <li>• Expand connections and learning</li> <li>• Increase cross-divisional collaboration</li> </ul>	<p>“Wellness is not a destination, it is an active process on a daily basis toward a healthy and fulfilling life...”</p> <p>– Jennifer Johnson, Director, Skagit County Public Health</p>



# GOAL 1: Partnerships & Collective Impact

## Unified Command Overview

On March 23, 2020, Unified Command was activated in Skagit County to address the broader health and safety impacts of COVID-19, as well as the needs of our community. This structure ensured constant communication with stakeholders and local response personnel, allowing critical information to be disseminated quickly and efficiently. It became evident quite quickly that our COVID-19 response would be complex and would benefit from a multi-jurisdictional effort to broaden the response. Although activating Unified Command was familiar to our community before COVID, doing so for a public health emergency was less so. The COVID-19 pandemic was different, but we were still able to rely on the same types of structures needed to respond to floods or other similar emergencies.

### Who was Skagit's Unified Command?



**Law Enforcement**  
Sheriff Don McDermott



**Fire Department**  
Chief Bryan Brice,  
Mount Vernon Fire Dept.



**Public Health**  
Jennifer Johnson,  
Director

Early on, Unified Command established operational branches necessary to support COVID-19 response.

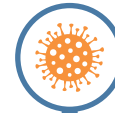
#### Branches included:

- Public Health Branch
- First Responder Branch
- Long-Term Care Branch
- Hospital Branch
- Testing Branch
- Vaccine Branch, added fall of 2020

#### Under Unified Command, Public Health was responsible for:

- Widespread community testing and launching rapid response teams for businesses, schools, childcare facilities, and long-term care facilities with multiple infections
- Robust disease investigation and contact tracing
- Quarantine and isolation supports
- Workplace and business support—guidance on sanitation and social distancing
- Preparing for the safe re-opening of businesses

## COVID-19



## Timeline

### January 2020

#### January 23

First case of COVID-19 diagnosed in the US in Everett.

### March 2020

#### March 10

First case of COVID-19 diagnosed in a Skagit resident.

#### March 22

Public Health establishes an isolation and quarantine facility as an option for those who cannot isolate or quarantine safely at home.

#### March 27

Public Health deploys to first long-term care facility outbreak.

#### March

Outbreak occurs related to a Skagit Valley Chorale group practice, leading to 53 cases, of which two members died. Public Health's report on the outbreak is published in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report on May 15, 2020.

#### March 30

Public Health establishes its Employer Response Team, providing guidance, support and resources to businesses.

### April 2020

#### April 21

Skagit County Unified Command opens a drive-through COVID-19 testing site at Skagit Valley College (SVC).

### Summer through Fall 2020

Public Health works closely with K-12 schools and childcare facilities to plan for safe services.

### September 2020

#### September

COVID-19 mass vaccination planning begins.

### November 2020

#### November 18

Inclement weather results in move of COVID-19 testing location from SVC to a weather-proof site at Skagit County Fairgrounds.

### December 2020

#### December

Public Health becomes a registered COVID-19 vaccine provider and prepares the Skagit County Fairgrounds as a COVID-19 Mass Vaccination Site.

#### December 29

Public Health administers its first vaccines at the fairgrounds site.

As 2020 ends, Public Health gears up to launch a full-time mass vaccination site, provide support and guidance so schools can increase in-person learning, and lay the first building blocks toward recovery from the pandemic.

### Year 2020

39,066 COVID-19 tests administered at what proved to be the longest continuously operating community-based COVID-19 test location in the state.



Communicable Disease staff testing out PPE in March 2020



Public Health saw thousands of individuals and families come through its COVID Test Site in 2020. It was an incredible opportunity to serve our community.



## COVID-19 TESTING

In collaboration with Skagit County Unified Command, Skagit Valley College (SVC), Northwest Laboratory and the Skagit County Department of Emergency Management (DEM), the COVID-19 Drive-Through Test Site was launched on April 21, 2020. The test site transformed from a mere idea to testing Skagitonians in only two days!

Unified Command provided planning and oversight, SVC generously offered its parking lot for the site, DEM delivered a host of resources and volunteers, Northwest Laboratory stepped up as our COVID-19 lab, and Public Health contributed staffing and clinical expertise.

Immediately, there was a rush for tests, with long lines of people eager for results. Those with positive results were provided with critical information and support so they could isolate and their close contacts could quarantine, which proved a major means to slow community spread of COVID-19. The test results also offered key data from which Public Health and partners could gauge the progression of the disease and take informed action.

In November, multiple windstorms blew down the test site's tents and sent staff and volunteers scrambling. As we thanked SVC for its incredible support, Skagit County Parks and Recreation generously offered its Fairgrounds buildings for a weather-resistant test site.

By the end of 2020, 39,066 COVID-19 tests had been administered! Skagit was the only Washington county to operate a low-barrier COVID-19 test site from the early onset of the disease throughout the entire remainder of 2020.

## COVID-19 VACCINE PLANNING: Skagit County's Rollout

Beginning in the fall of 2020, Public Health engaged in intensive planning for its COVID-19 vaccination roll-out. Planning comprised federal, state, and local coordination, including our local hospitals, medical clinics, long-term care facilities, pharmacies, and city and town governments. The COVID-19 Drive-Through Test Site transitioned seamlessly into Skagit's mass vaccination site beginning in December 2020. The processes and logistics developed at the test site enabled Public Health to quickly ramp up operations as vaccines became available.

Public Health worked with local community providers, including pharmacies and tribal clinics, to launch the vaccine roll-out. Staff began by mass emailing status updates with what we knew, what we did not know, and what our partners could expect in the near future. Staff supported and encouraged clinics and pharmacies to register to become COVID vaccine providers while fielding storage and handling questions that arose. Web-based meetings were held between local elected officials, long-term care facilities, and large businesses to begin coordination. Staff actively brainstormed and made plans for a number of different scenarios to ensure that we were prepared for the amount and types of vaccines the Washington State Department of Health would deliver. We were fully ready to roll prior to receipt of our initial shipments! And when shipments were smaller than desired, or when they were delayed due to weather, staff coordinated with other counties to get crucial vaccine supplies for our community.



Planning the COVID Test Site at Skagit Valley College





## MESSAGE FROM THE POPULATION HEALTH TRUST

2019 was a productive year for the Population Health Trust (Trust). The Trust invested significant time into understanding health equity. It received training, reviewed data, held many conversations that led to identifying health equity as a major goal of its work, and wrote a statement for its guiding principles document. The Trust continued advocacy efforts and partnership work on opioids, the First Thousand Days program, and developing health improvement plans for housing and homelessness. The Trust also hosted the first Skagit County state-of-health event titled “Powerful Partnerships.”

Success from this community education and outreach event included:

- 200 individuals gained a deep understanding about the Trust, its mission and activities
- Participants learned about collective impact gains and opportunities that arise when community organizations work together to enact health solutions
- The Trust became associated with community health initiatives

In 2020, the Trust was intensely focused on the impacts of COVID-19 and how the pandemic affected—and continues to affect—individuals and groups within Skagit County. Through surveys, key sector leader interviews, and many discussions with members of the community, the Trust sought to understand the health issues that place individuals at risk, what information and resource needs exist, and what structural barriers keep Skagitonians from fully realizing their optimal health. A particular focus of these gatherings was identifying potential solutions for those who face such barriers to good health.



Three films addressing issues impacting the public were developed during particular phases of the pandemic, including:



**COVID and Recreation**, to address barriers to activities that support physical and mental health during periods of quarantine and isolation



**COVID and the Economy**, to detail how economic stability and Public Health protocols are inseparable



**COVID and Behavioral Health**, to promote the destigmatization of behavioral health challenges resulting from a long year of isolation, stress, and sacrifice

Public Health was able to be culturally responsive in its approach to COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and isolation/quarantine support services in large part due to its ongoing partnership with the North Sound Accountable Community of Health (ACH). Between planning and coordination of COVID-19 testing for agricultural workers, food and care kits for individuals in quarantine and isolation, mobile flu vaccine clinics at Maiben Park in Burlington, and continued work on Skagit's opioid response, Public Health thanks the ACH for support and for leading the charge on health equity work.



## STATEMENT ON HEALTH EQUITY

COVID-19 brought to light health inequities that have long existed and threaten the well-being and lives of people of color. Throughout the pandemic, we have seen COVID-19 disproportionately impact our Latinx populations. Higher rates of infection, limited access to health care, and language barriers to critical information in community messaging resulted in dire risks.

To address these unacceptable inequities, Public Health added a team of multilingual, multicultural staff who better reflect our community. Spanish and Mixtec language service delivery was greatly broadened. This resulted in expanded and improved accessibility in our case investigation, contact tracing, COVID-19 testing, and community communications. Collaboration with Latinx leaders and organizations that serve Latinx communities strongly improved our efforts. Spanish language videos, website content, and daily updates were made a central part of our work.

Local Tribal governments and communities—including Samish Indian Nation, Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, and Upper Skagit Indian Tribe—took some of the most decisive action right from the early days of COVID-19, protecting Tribal members from exposure to COVID-19. Collaborations between the Tribes and Public Health proved highly beneficial to our efforts, and we are greatly thankful for this support.

Public Health's pandemic response enabled us to improve our efforts to better address the results of systemic racism. We realize that during the long haul of the pandemic—and even after the threat of COVID-19 is over—our department could falter in our health equity efforts. We intentionally commit to the long-term, rigorous work necessary to foster equity in serving all Skagitonians.



## GOAL 2: Communications & Messaging

Communications pre-COVID were focused heavily on our substance use prevention work and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention and treatment services. Our team relied on more traditional means for getting out information like press releases, the department website, and limited social media.

COVID-19 showed us what we already knew: **Direct access to health information and resources is critical to Skagitonians' health and well-being.** Public Health responded by ramping up its messaging in strategic ways. More focus was given to providing multilingual content, and voices from our community were incorporated to better communicate with our diverse residents. The team found new and creative ways to provide guidance and resource links to the community—many of which the department will continue to use moving forward!

Some communications added in 2020 include:

- **The Skagit County Public Health COVID-19 website** contained crucial COVID-19 information and links to resources, including COVID-19 testing, vaccination, prevention, isolation and quarantine, and the rate of local diagnosed cases.

[www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthDiseases/coronavirus.htm](http://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthDiseases/coronavirus.htm)

- **The Conversations COVID-19** video series broadcasted 29 episodes in 2020, in both English and Spanish.

[www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthDiseases/coronavirusVIDEO.htm](http://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthDiseases/coronavirusVIDEO.htm)

- **Skagit Health Connection** was a new way to communicate with the community, providing not only critical COVID-19 content, but also stories and perspectives from people throughout our county. The website's featured blogs are a favorite, frequently highlighting guest contributors with unique viewpoints and personal experiences.

[skagitcounty.blog](http://skagitcounty.blog)

- **Skagit Helps**, a resource website that connects people to behavioral health and basic needs resources, was launched in late 2020 in response to increased behavioral health needs due to COVID-19.

[skagithelps.org](http://skagithelps.org)

- **SkagitRising** was launched in October 2020, providing opioid and substance use resources and educational information, harm reduction/prevention techniques, local services, and tips for supporting others.

[skagitrising.org](http://skagitrising.org)

- Social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and NextDoor, allowed for quick and wide-spread messaging, which was necessary during a pandemic! Information was shared in English and Spanish, reaching a broad audience.



SkagitRising





## GOAL 3: Lifespan Health

### From the Beginning: Child & Family Health

Our Child & Family Health Division had an incredibly busy year in 2019! New initiatives and trainings were launched, including our Perinatal Mental Health trainings and parenting support groups. Partnerships with community providers were deepened and projects like the Welcome Baby model were expanded to ensure Skagit County families had access to critical resources and services. In coordination with the Children's Council, the Bright Beginnings program launched both a website and call/text line. Events like Family Palooza were held in partnership with United Way, which brought smiles and necessary information to those who care for some of our most precious residents.







Nurse-Family Partnership team meeting



Community providers in deep thought at Skagit County's "Promoting Inclusivity" event

## DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES & TRANSITIONS SERVICES

Public Health's Developmental Disabilities (DD) program finds new ways to promote opportunities to integrate supported employment into the fabric of businesses and corporations in Skagit County.

On October 15, 2019, program leadership hosted an event called "Promoting Inclusivity: A Conversation about Jobs for People with Developmental Disabilities in Skagit County." It was an opportunity for employers, supported employment providers, self-advocates, and other stakeholders to engage in a facilitated discussion around the current and future state of inclusive hiring in our community. The conversations addressed the business case for hiring people with developmental disabilities, the barriers that local employers often face related to hiring people with disabilities, and potential supports or resources that key stakeholders could provide to assist employers in participating in supported employment.

Thirty-five attendees, including employers that currently employ people with developmental disabilities and employers seeking to learn more about supported employment, shared input that will help the Developmental Disabilities program design more specific, targeted outreach strategies to engage potential employers in supported employment.

As a part of the Public Health Department, the DD program spent the majority of 2020 working to keep individuals with developmental disabilities safe, healthy, and connected to resources and services during the COVID-19 pandemic. And more so than ever, the program worked hand-in-hand with providers to ensure their viability in a fee-for-service based system. More than 70% of people with disabilities who were receiving supported employment services lost their jobs or were furloughed due to COVID-19. This was a huge loss of personal support and meaningful daily activity for people engaged in the program. The DD program worked with the State Developmental Disabilities Administration and regional partners to create a temporary system of COVID funding to ensure that providers were able to provide remote services to individuals, families, and businesses coping with the impacts of COVID-19 in their lives.

The DD program also developed and distributed outreach materials throughout the community for groups and agencies that serve people with disabilities in order to provide guidance on how to keep clients and their families healthy and safe. The DD Program published an updated resource guide for the community and went live with a new website for the program in 2020.

## NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Our Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) team supported the health and well-being of pregnant women and young children in 118 families in 2019-2020, in spite of the challenges posed by the pandemic. Nurses had to pivot to telehealth visits, and we had significant staffing transitions due to nurses needing to focus on the needs of their own families. Through various community partnerships, we were able to remain connected to clients by supplying technology supports and doing porch-drops of basic needs and items to support parent-child interaction. For some clients, the telehealth option improved our ability to serve them. Our nurses are eager to safely resume home visits, but we are also grateful that telehealth will likely remain an option for supporting our NFP families.



## FAMILY COVID RESOURCE CENTER

In 2020, Public Health received CARES Act funding, which sparked creative solutions to challenges posed by COVID-19. A partnership was forged with the Children's Museum of Skagit County to create a resource center for families adversely impacted by the pandemic. This new resource center, housed at the museum, offers a host of supports, including:

- Basic needs such as diapers, baby wipes and other supplies
- Fun learning activities for young kids to enjoy independently, giving parents much-needed breaks to focus on work and keeping a household running
- Help accessing community resources, such as food, rental support and mortgage assistance programs



**69**  
children  
aged 0-3  
received early  
intervention  
services  
in 2020



**195**  
adults  
aged 21+  
received  
employment  
services  
in 2020

Prevention & School-based health

SCHOOL-BASED BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

With the shared goals of increasing school attendance, academic achievement, and addressing the social and emotional determinants of health and learning, Public Health and our local school districts partnered to fund master’s level School Social Workers at select school campuses throughout the county. School Social Workers practice Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), providing direct services and referring to community providers when intensive or crisis services and supports are needed. By focusing on these tiers—from general health promotion and prevention services to intensive support and intervention services—our students benefit from a system that meets them where they are at in their behavioral health journeys.

OUTCOMES FROM THE 2018/2019 ACADEMIC SCHOOL YEAR




Increasing students’ access to assistance:  
Six School Social Workers and one licensed mental health counselor providing services full time in each Skagit district

855  
unduplicated  
students served

5,306  
sessions with  
students

151  
students received  
ongoing mental health  
treatment  
(2 or more sessions)

This holistic approach to behavioral health supports also allowed districts to activate their School Social Workers during the early months of the pandemic. Supports were provided at the individual, family, school, and district level during these unprecedented times.

VIRTUAL ROLE OF SCHOOL BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC	
	<div><div></div>Communicate with Families</div> <div><div></div>Refer/Link to Services</div> <div><div></div>Coping Strategies</div>
District Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Share resources with district administration and colleagues</li><li>• Some resources could end up on school district mental health resources page for public access</li></ul>
Staff Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consultation to staff (communicating with staff about student social-emotional concerns and questions as they arise)</li><li>• Help identify &amp; distribute resources related to staff wellness</li></ul>
Family Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help connect families to resources</li><li>• E-learning plans and caregiver-led instruction</li><li>• Communicate with families</li></ul>
Student Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help connect students to resources</li><li>• Direct behavioral/mental health services (individual &amp; group tele/video sessions)</li><li>• Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lesson delivery</li><li>• Suicide prevention, safety planning via telehealth</li></ul>
Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Self-care; establishing routines, working to maintain professional boundaries, etc.</li></ul>



Woolley Wellness Center  
Ribbon Cutting

SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CENTER

Both data and input from the public indicated that there were serious concerns around access to health services among our student populations. As Chief Health Strategist, Public Health envisioned a creative way to bring health services to our students and convened a group of like-minded community partners to make this vision a reality. In February 2020, the Woolley Wellness Center, the first school-based health center in Skagit, officially opened at Sedro-Woolley High School. The health center is available to all students in need of health services—a welcomed resource for those who may have experienced barriers to accessing health care services in the community. This project is a joint effort between Skagit County Public Health, the Sedro-Woolley School District, and PeaceHealth United General Medical Center.

SUICIDE PREVENTION IN ACTION

According to Mental Health America’s 2019 national assessment on mental health and access to care, Washington state youths have poor behavioral health, ranking 31st out of 50 states in the United States. Results from the 2018 Healthy Youth Survey shows that suicide is the second leading cause of death for Washington teens 15-19 years old, and rates of depression and anxiety are on the rise. Understanding that mental health conditions are treatable and suicide is preventable, Public Health partnered with our area schools to get out training and resources to teachers and students.

Kevin Hines, an award-winning global speaker and suicide prevention advocate, shared his inspirational story with 1,180 students from Sedro-Woolley High School and State Street School, plus teachers and staff. Kevin has reached millions with his story of unlikely survival and his strong will to live. His message to Skagit youth busted myths, provided a call to action, and encouraged all to live—and stay—mentally well.



*“The presentation was amazing!!! I cannot tell you how appreciative our students and parents were that [Public Health] supported his presentation for our school.”*

– Kerri Carlton, Principal of Sedro-Woolley High School





Meals on Wheels delivered  
**94,204** meals  
 in 2019  
 to seniors in Skagit County

**365** clients

received 1 meal per day

**7** days  
 /week



Meals on Wheels delivered  
**141,157** meals  
 in 2020  
 to seniors in Skagit County

**440** clients

received 1 meal per day

**7** days  
 /week



## SENIOR SERVICES

The Senior Nutrition Program is a crucial service that promotes health and independence among our senior population. One of the few remaining counties to offer homemade, hot, home-delivered meals, Skagit County ensures that seniors have access to nutritious food, which protects them from malnutrition, loneliness and chronic disease. Skagit County Meals on Wheels currently provides 440 clients with fresh, nutritious food seven days a week.

In addition to home-delivered meals, the Skagit County Senior Centers offer the further protective factors of educational and social programs to support and encourage their patrons' ongoing wellness. The Senior Centers reach seniors in Anacortes, Burlington, Clearlake, Concrete, La Conner, Mount Vernon, and Sedro-Woolley. In the last two years, Skagit County Public Health has collaborated with partner agencies in the interest of supporting our senior population. Some examples of these partnerships are:

- Community Action to provide services in East County
- AARP to provide tax preparation
- Swinomish Tribal Community to provide farmers market vouchers and other nutritional support to areas of need
- Community Prevention and Wellness Initiative Prevention Coalition (MV HOPE) to provide medicine lock boxes and educational materials
- Local law enforcement to provide education on fraud and senior safety

The program is a true community collaboration led by Skagit County Public Health. With these partnerships in place, we will continue to support our seniors' overall health and well-being.



*"Thank you for your wonderful service to me when I REALLY needed it!"*

– Jo E.

## SENIOR SERVICES— Response to the Pandemic

- Due to the pandemic, the number of Meals on Wheels clients increased by more than 28%!
- Senior Services staff assisted in the response at the COVID-19 test site, vaccine site and the vaccine hotline center.
- Meals on Wheels clients received weekly written updates from Senior Services on the COVID-19 response in the county, providing seniors with a dependable source of crucial current information.
- All Meals on Wheels clients were offered a mobile COVID-19 vaccination option.

*"Thank you for the delivery of Meals on Wheels for my mom. This service is very helpful and she is eating better."*

– Susan S.

## GOAL 4: Systems & Social Determinants of Health

### HOUSING/EMERGENCY SERVICES

Skagit County has continued to grapple with a growing affordable housing crisis, with those living in poverty most directly affected. Individuals and families within our community face the prospect of losing their homes due to precarious financial conditions, domestic violence, health crises, chronic mental health and substance use disorders. Furthermore, the rising cost of housing and stagnant wages increases the risk of people losing their housing and makes it increasingly difficult to find affordable housing.

The COVID-19 pandemic only further exacerbated these housing challenges. As Chief Health Strategist, Public Health continues to make recommendations on innovative funding strategies and identifies key partnerships between agencies that can affect change.



### HOUSING SUMMIT

In October 2019, Skagit County hosted a Housing Summit at McIntyre Hall to discuss current efforts and innovative solutions to address homelessness and the affordable housing crisis. Tedd Kelleher, from the Washington State Department of Commerce, and Margaret Morales, from Sightline Institute, were the keynote speakers. More than 200 attendees viewed the debut of the locally produced video “A Place to Call Home.”

New partnerships were formed as a result of the Housing Summit, including the Mayor Shelter Planning Group that first met in 2020. Their shared vision led to the development of a year-round, low-barrier shelter, a vision that is now coming to fruition in Burlington. This new shelter—Skagit First Steps Center—opened on June 14, 2021.

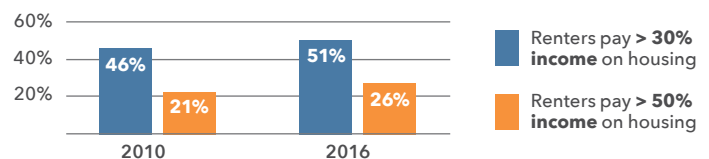


### HOME PROGRAM

Access to affordable housing is a great need in our community. More than 50% of Skagit County renters are what HUD calls “cost-burdened” and spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Skagit County is the lead organization for a regional HOME Consortium that supports affordable housing using funding from the US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD). The Consortium includes participation from three counties and 17 towns and cities. In 2019, the Town of Sedro-Woolley joined as a member of the Consortium, which means that 100% of the local jurisdictions in Skagit County now participate.

The largest funded activity of the HOME Consortium in past years provides direct rental assistance to low-income households. Residents pay up to 30% of their income on rent, and HOME funds cover the remaining cost of rent.

#### COST-BURDENED RENTERS



#### HOME RENTAL ASSISTANCE BY THE NUMBERS

<b>\$12</b> Minimum Wage	<b>\$14.06</b> Average Renter Wage	<b>\$23.23</b> 2 Bd Housing Wage at FMR	<b>\$1,208</b> HUD Fair Market Rent (2 Bd Apt)	<b>1.9</b> Full-time jobs at min. wage to afford 2 Bd at FMR
<b>\$1,144</b> Average Unit Rent	<b>\$1,031</b> Average Mo. Household Income	<b>275</b> Individuals Served	<b>\$615,196</b> Total Rental Assistance Provided	Skagit County has a historically low vacancy rate of <b>0.3%</b>

### FUTURE HOME CONSORTIUM DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The Skagit County HOME Consortium is also building a pipeline of affordable housing development projects. In 2019, the Consortium made preliminary funding awards to Catholic Housing Services for the Skagit County Permanent Supportive Housing project to be located in Mount Vernon and to Home Trust of Skagit's Channel Cove Affordable Homeownership Project in La Conner.

### THE 26th AND 27th STREET PROJECTS by ANACORTES FAMILY CENTER

In the summer of 2019, Skagit County provided Real Estate Excise Tax funds to Anacortes Family Center for the acquisition of property located on 26th Street in Anacortes, the future site of 14-20 units of affordable housing for low-income households. Anacortes Family Center also opened the doors of its completed 27th Street Project, a 20-unit affordable housing project supported with \$200,000 of Skagit County Real Estate Excise Tax funding.





## VETS CONNECT

In May 2019, the Robert M. Gates Skagit Vets Connect center opened its doors in Burlington. Skagit Vets Connect is operated by Community Action of Skagit County and partially funded by Skagit County Public Health through the County Veterans Assistance Fund. Skagit Vets Connect provides a centralized location for veterans seeking a range of services, including emergency financial assistance, housing, and assistance in applying for benefits through the Veterans Administration.



Staff provided care packages containing food and other essentials to those in COVID quarantine or isolation.

## EMERGENCY SHELTER

Public Health provides oversight of the county's homeless crisis response system and has advocated tirelessly for adequate access to shelter. The 2020 Homeless Point in Time Count in Skagit County identified 403 individuals experiencing homelessness on one night in January. Skagit County Public Health funded emergency winter shelter programs through partnerships with Friendship House, Anacortes Family Center, Anacortes Salvation Army and Welcome Home Skagit.

When COVID-19 made it unsafe to house people, particularly vulnerable individuals in congregate settings, Skagit County began funding motel rooms for high-risk individuals experiencing homelessness. The motel programs addressed immediate and critical needs, but it was clear that sustainable shelter resources must be developed.

Skagit County, local mayors, and other stakeholders convened regularly to plan a long-term response. In 2020, this collaboration laid the foundation for an exciting achievement. In June 2021, the City of Burlington opened The Skagit First Steps Center comprised of individual prefabricated units, which replaces the seasonal shelter model with a permanent year-round facility on city-owned land. Friendship House operates the shelter, and Public Health provides capital and operational funding.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT HOMEOWNERSHIP ASSISTANCE PROJECT

The CDBG Homeownership Assistance project helps low- to moderate-income homebuyers purchase a home, opening up the dream of homeownership to people who would otherwise not be able to afford it. Eligible homebuyers who work with partnering nonprofits in Skagit, Island, San Juan, and Whatcom counties can access up to \$25,000 in grant funding to lower the purchase price of their homes. In 2019 and 2020, 13 homebuyers were assisted through this program and now benefit from affordable, predictable and stable home costs.

In Skagit County, rents have risen more than 75% since 2012, and nearly half of low-income households are cost burdened by their housing expenses, meaning they spend more than 30% of their monthly income on housing. This program directly addresses the issue of rising housing costs by increasing the supply of affordable homes and improving the health of the entire housing system in our community.

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING, HOMELESS SERVICE RESPONSE & EVICTION PREVENTION

The grave economic impacts of COVID-19 produced a wave of housing insecurity. In response, Public Health quickly ramped up new and expanded housing initiatives. This response was not only central to the well-being of those experiencing unstable housing or homelessness, it protected people particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 and provided separate shelter to Skagitonians in need of supports so they could maintain isolation or quarantine and prevent the transmission of the disease to others. Services included:

- 1 Isolation and quarantine housing and supports services—\$590,821 in services
- 2 Hotel vouchers for people with high-risk health conditions who were experiencing homelessness—\$564,953 in services
- 3 Mortgage Assistance Program—\$162,400 in services
- 4 Rental assistance and support services—\$2,991,610 in 2019 and 2020
- 5 Eviction prevention assistance—\$1,389,204 in assistance



## GOAL 5: Health Protection

Despite the abundant challenges posed by COVID-19, Public Health remained dedicated to its core foundational public health functions that help to ensure Skagitonians are safe and healthy. The activities in these areas are unique to Public Health and provide the public with key services not delivered elsewhere in the medical or broader community. Readers are likely aware of the work Public Health does in regards to disease investigation, but many might not know what our other core functions are. From ensuring our community has clean drinking water and assessing and removing chemical or microbial threats from the environment, to responding to emergencies that threaten our community's health, these are all our essential and basic responsibilities as your Public Health department.



### POLICIES TO PROMOTE & PROTECT HEALTH

#### No Smoking & Vaping in Public Places Ordinance

In 2019, the Skagit County Board of Health used its unique authority under RCW 70.05.60 to pass a "No Smoking or Vaping in Public Places" county-wide ordinance. With teen vaping rates increasing and a national outbreak of e-cigarette-associated lung injury, the ordinance couldn't have come at a better time!

The Smoking and Vaping ordinance (Chapter 12.51) protects the community by:



- Prohibiting smoking/vaping in any indoor public place or place of employment, including outdoor work areas
- Prohibiting smoking/vaping outdoors on the property of schools and childcare facilities and on outdoor public spaces where children congregate, such as playgrounds, parks, beaches, athletic fields, and stadiums

#### Overdose as a Notifiable Condition

The Overdose as a Notifiable Condition ordinance, which went into effect in April of 2019, requires that health care providers notify Public Health of an opioid overdose within 72 hours of diagnosis. Public Health collects and evaluates the data which then aids in developing strategies and targeting interventions to areas of greatest need. When notified of an overdose, Public Health makes assertive contact with the individuals using motivational interviewing to provide support and connect to services.



#### THE WINTER HOLIDAY SHELTER: A Warm & Safe Place

For the first time, Skagit County opened the Mount Vernon Senior Center on Christmas and New Year's Day as a safe and warm place for people to spend the holidays. About 30 people had stopped by for snacks, a cup of coffee, or a place

to get out of the cold. Several community members came by to drop off gifts like warm clothes, toiletries, blankets, tarps and food. Among them was County Commissioner Lisa Janicki, who stopped by with Target and Safeway gift cards to distribute on Christmas Day.

### PROTECT HEALTH: Our Opioid Response Continues

The pandemic has not reduced the threat of opioids; it has increased many Skagitonians' vulnerability to opioid and other substance use disorders. Examples of key programs that continued throughout 2020 are the State Opioid Response and the Syringe Exchange Program (SEP).

#### STATE OPIOID RESPONSE (SOR) PROGRAM

The State Opioid Response program uses state funding to support people in their recoveries from Opioid Use Disorder. SOR provides practical solutions to the barriers clients face, opening up opportunities and reducing the stressors that can undermine the recovery process. Catholic Community Services operates the SOR program, providing recovery support services including basic necessities; shoes, clothing, and supplies for work or school; medical, vision, and dental needs; childcare needs; rental assistance for recovery houses; and transportation assistance so clients can get to work, school, or appointments. In 2020, 47 people were enrolled in the program, receiving an average of \$4,000 in recovery support services.

An example of SOR's many successes is a client who completed the SOR program, during which she worked incredibly hard to have full custody of her kids reinstated by following through with all requirements of Child Protective Services. This person was proactive in engaging in outpatient treatment, searching for housing options, and gaining a full-time job. SOR gave her time to focus on recovery while some of her day-to-day needs were taken care of through this program.

**In 2020, 47 people were served by this program.**

Skagit County Public Health also funds the Recovery And Community (RAC) program, begun in August of 2019, which is designed to help individuals in recovery from any type of substance use disorder, primarily alcohol, amphetamines, benzodiazepines, opioids, or stimulants.



## SYRINGE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

In 2019 and 2020, the Syringe Exchange Program (SEP) distributed 1,319,630 sterile syringes in a one-to-one exchange of used syringes. This harm-reduction program reduces the reuse and sharing of needles, lessening the rates of infection and spread of blood-borne pathogens. Used syringes are properly disposed of, keeping the community safer. Additionally, the familiarity and trust that grows between clients and staff over time results in many clients engaging in treatment and seeking recovery.

As fentanyl becomes more common in our region, it is increasingly important for people to know if a substance contains this synthetic opioid. Fentanyl can be deadly even in small doses. SEP handed out 1,866 fentanyl test strips during 2019 and 2020.

During the same timeframe, SEP also distributed 770 NARCAN® kits, used to directly save lives by reversing opioid overdoses. SEP reported that 109 overdoses in the county were reversed using 195 doses of NARCAN® that were distributed by the program.

## SECURE MEDICINE RETURN SPREADS THROUGHOUT SKAGIT COUNTY

In fulfillment of a major opioid prevention goal, Skagit County's Secure Medicine Return program became a reality for residents in 2019. Thanks in great part to the dedicated outreach of former Population Health Trust member Randy



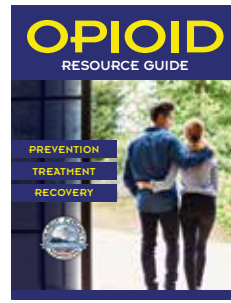
Elde (representing the Pharmacy sector), local pharmacies committed to partnering with Public Health and MedProject to provide secure drop bins for their clients. By the end of 2019, five pharmacies and five law enforcement agencies provided residents convenient medication disposal options. Additionally, 22 community sites, such as libraries, senior centers, and fire departments, became hosts for free medication disposal mailers.

## MAT EXPANSION & INITIATION at the COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER

Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) is an evidence-based treatment for those struggling with substance use disorder (SUD) and is provided at the Skagit County Community Justice Center.

Inmates who are participating in a community MAT program when booked are continued on their program. This occurs for both those on Suboxone or Methadone programs. Inmates diagnosed with SUDs are given education regarding MAT providers and options, overdose risks, NARCAN® kits and/or prescriptions for NARCAN® kits at release.

Appointments are made with a community-based MAT provider for inmates when they are released so they can continue medication therapies. These appointments are usually the same day, but if release is on the weekend or holiday, prescriptions are provided as needed to ensure sufficient medication until their appointment date. Inmates are provided with resource information for walk-in clinics providing counseling services and are strongly encouraged to participate. By directly linking inmates to services upon release, their ability to sustain recovery in the community is vastly increased. This is another example of how practical, straightforward resources often achieve great successes.



## OWLT and the OPIOID RESOURCE GUIDE

From the first meetings of the Opioid Workgroup Leadership Team (OWLT), members had sights on an opioid resource guide to help those experiencing Opioid Use Disorder and their families connect to services, programs, and people who could help them. However, they knew that the first priority was to expand

the number of providers offering services like Medication Assisted Treatment and wrap-around services so there was somewhere to send individuals desiring treatment. By 2019, enough new MAT services and recovery supports were added in Skagit County that an opioid resource guide could be developed. Beginning in the summer of 2019, Skagit County Public Health began distributing opioid resource guides to hospitals, clinics, treatment providers, prevention coalitions, police departments, libraries, and community events, among other places. To date, 3,000 English and 400 Spanish guides have been distributed.

## RECOVERY HOUSING

Public Health funds two recovery homes operated by New Earth Recovery, including a women's house that opened in October 2020. These homes house a minimum of 12 low-income individuals who are recovering from substance use disorders and seek to main recovery. Residents, who contribute 30% of their income toward housing costs, may be transitioning from homelessness, inpatient treatment facilities, criminal justice facilities, or shelters, and are in need of a safe, supportive living environment. The recovery homes offer peer support and assistance obtaining treatment and support services. Most residents see an increase in employment and housing stability, while they see a decrease in involvement in the criminal justice system. During the biennium, New Earth Recovery's two recovery homes housed 22 people, of whom 12 found jobs; five took classes toward their GEDs, diplomas, or AA degrees; seven regained their driver's license; and 13 reported improved relationships with their families.

The recovery homes offer peer support and assistance obtaining treatment and support services.

## TRANSITIONAL LIVING

Pioneer Human Services operates a transitional living facility that provides safe, stable housing for up to ten individuals at a time who have mental illness and/or substance use disorders. Public Health funds the operation of this facility, including staff time. Services include linking residents to case management, income benefits, treatment services, permanent housing opportunities, medical care, transportation, and life skills training. The Transition House provided homes for 32 people in 2019 and 21 people in 2020.

One success story involves Adam, who participated in intensive outpatient treatment and relapse prevention during his stay at the Transition House. While he was living at the Transition House, his confidence grew as he worked on his mental health issues and built a better life for himself. He has since moved into his own apartment and serves as a sponsor for two young men who recently joined the Transition House program.



## LOW-INCOME SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Public Health partners with several providers in the community to offer substance use disorder and/or mental health services to low-income individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid and don't have health insurance or are under-insured. Providers in 2019 and 2020 included Catholic Community Services, Compass Health, Island Hospital, Pioneer Human Services, Sea Mar, and Sunrise Services. In this time period, Public Health paid these organizations more than \$301,000 to provide necessary behavioral health services for Skagit County residents who otherwise would not have had access to this care.

A Transition House success story—meet Adam and Baby Girl.

## ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

While COVID-19 demanded an unprecedented Public Health response, our Environmental Health division continued to keep our community safe. In 2019 and 2020, we performed the following:

### FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS



**Zero**  
food-borne  
outbreaks  
occurred in 2020.

Public Health  
investigated and promptly  
addressed

**one**  
food-borne  
outbreak in 2019

**856**  
inspections  
at food establishments  
in 2020;

**1,669**  
in 2019

**848**  
food handlers cards  
issued in 2020  
and

**826**  
in 2019

### ON-SITE SEPTIC

**225**  
septic permits  
were issued  
in 2020;

**111**  
in 2019

**151**  
repair permits  
were issued  
in 2020;

**110**  
in 2019

Public Health performed

**61**  
site evaluations  
in 2020 and

**111**  
in 2019



### SOLID & HAZARDOUS WASTE

There were  
**237**  
inquiries  
in the community  
in 2020 and

**248**  
in 2019

**13**  
facilities  
were permitted  
in 2020;

**13**  
in 2019

### SECURE MEDICINE RETURN

**2,368**  
pounds  
of medications  
returned by  
the public and  
safely disposed  
of in 2020;

**1,877**  
pounds were  
returned in 2019



### POLLUTION PREVENTION

In 2020  
**25**  
facilities,  
compared to,  
**115**  
in 2019,  
were provided with  
**technical  
assistance**  
to learn safe  
chemical practices  
and safer alternatives  
to prevent pollution  
to our soil  
and water.

### RECREATIONAL SAFETY



There were  
**25**  
inspections  
of public pools & spas  
in 2020;

**73**  
in 2019

In 2020 all camp  
sites were  
**closed**  
due to  
COVID-19;

**Eight**  
were inspected  
and permitted  
in 2019.







Case Investigation staff worked seven days a week. Above you see staff on Thanksgiving and Christmas mornings, feeling rather festive despite being in the office!

## COVID-19 CASE INVESTIGATION & CONTACT TRACING

When someone tests positive for COVID-19, prompt follow up is essential to control the spread of disease. Throughout the pandemic, Public Health has continued to reach positive cases quickly to trace potentially exposed contacts and locations and provide clear information on next steps. Public Health regularly met and exceeded the Governor's goal of reaching 90% of cases within 24 hours.

**Out of 3,399 cases contacted in 2020, Public Health interviewed 92% within 24 hours.**

Out of 3,399 cases contacted in 2020, Public Health interviewed 92% within 24 hours. Only 3% of cases were lost to follow up and never located for an interview.

Case interviews helped identify close contacts who were exposed to COVID-19 and could soon become infectious. Public Health identified and followed up on 3,899 close contacts and mailed 2,846 quarantine letters.

Public Health also helped house cases and their contacts to limit transmission in households. In total, 201 individuals took Public Health's offer of housing in a motel or hotel during their isolation or quarantine.

During the late fall-winter surge of 2020, Public Health asked for help from the Washington State Department of Health centralized investigations team. During this time of extremely high volume, Public Health prioritized case investigations and continued to make initial notification calls on all lab-positive cases to assess exposures to workplaces, school, and other high-risk settings. Public Health continues to offer housing, groceries, sanitation kits, and other resources to those under isolation or quarantine.

Table 1. **Timeframe Between Initial Notification and Public Health Reaching a Case for Interview**

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Average
Within 24 hrs	89%	87%	91%	100%	96%	96%	100%	98%	91%	91%	92%
24 - 48 hrs	8%	3%	4%	0%	1%	2%	0%	1%	3%	3%	3%
48 - 72 hrs	1%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%	1%
After 72 hrs	0%	3%	3%	0%	1%	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Never Located	3%	4%	1%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	3%	4%	3%

Table 2. **Timeframe Between Initial Notification and Public Health Reaching a Close-Contact for Interview**

	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Average
Within 24 hrs	88%	83%	81%	93%	95%	95%	88%	91%	91%	92%	90%
24 - 48 hrs	7%	5%	9%	3%	2%	1%	4%	4%	4%	8%	4%
48 - 72 hrs	2%	3%	2%	2%	0%	1%	4%	0%	1%	0%	1%
After 72 hrs	1%	3%	5%	0%	1%	0%	1%	2%	2%	0%	2%
Never Located	2%	5%	3%	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%	0%	3%

## QUARANTINE & ISOLATION SERVICES & SUPPORTS

In April 2020, Public Health began leasing the entire facility at Motel 6 in Burlington to provide a place to isolate or quarantine for people who did not have a safe place to do so, or who had vulnerable family members at home who they did not want to expose to COVID 19. Public Health

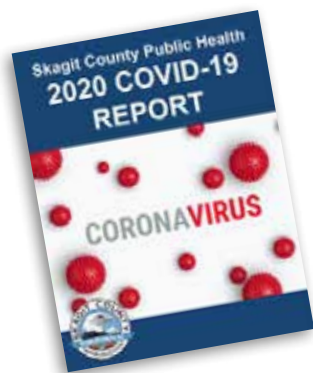
**During 2020, SCPH safely quarantined 201 people.**

contracted for 24/7 on-site security at the facility, cleaning services, and with various catering companies to provide daily meal delivery. Public Health staff arranged for all logistics for guests and provided daily check-ins and case management services for each guest. During 2020, 201 people stayed at this facility. At the end of 2020, we transitioned to providing rooms on an as-needed basis at a different hotel site.

## COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH TO AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Beginning in March 2020, a communications team was established to coordinate with our Long-term Care Facilities (LTC). Public Health began daily check-in calls with each facility and transitioned to weekly check-ins over time. Staff responded to cases in LTC facilities by assisting with COVID testing, linkage to infection control teams from Washington State Department of Health, and guidance from Skagit's Health Officer. Site visits were provided as needed to assist with testing and infection control. Beginning in the fall of 2020, Public Health began working with LTC facilities to plan for COVID vaccination, either by ensuring they signed up for the Federal Pharmacy Program or by planning vaccination through our department.

Public Health also created distribution lists for childcare/preschool and faith-based organizations to proactively communicate relevant COVID-19 information and to send updated sector guidance as it became available. Recipients were often grateful to have a personal contact at Public Health to field their questions, even if they weren't excited about some of the information that was shared. When exposures occurred in these settings, guidance was provided for isolation and quarantine. Earlier in the pandemic, Public Health provided daily check-ins with people on isolation or quarantine to monitor symptoms and to address any barriers to isolation or quarantine, including connecting people to financial assistance, and helping with delivery of grocery and hygiene supplies, etc.



## COVID-19 DATA REPORT

In March 2021, Public Health Epidemiologist, Lea Hamner, and County Information Officer, Laura Han, published the 2020 COVID-19 Data Report, which chronicled Skagit Public Health's COVID-19 response in detail.

The full report can be found on the website at: [www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthDiseases/2020COVIDdatareport.htm](http://www.skagitcounty.net/Departments/HealthDiseases/2020COVIDdatareport.htm).

## VITAL RECORDS: Public Health is with you from birth to death

The Vital Records program is a longstanding and key foundational Public Health service. When offices closed in March 2020 in response to COVID-19, Skagit County Public Health developed a safe method for Skagitonians to continue to pick up birth and death certificates at our Mount Vernon downtown administration building. Surrounding counties provided certificates by mail only. You'll notice below that our focus on ensuring the public had access to vital records throughout the pandemic resulted in only a slight 2.6% reduction in the overall numbers of certificates comparing 2020 to 2019. Birth certificates declined, likely due to a reduction in travel; birth certificates are often used in securing passports and drivers' licenses renewals. Death certificates increased, likely due to residents of surrounding counties coming to our office so they can pick up the documents without waiting for mail delivery. Please note that the fee paid by these neighboring county residents offsets the cost incurred by Public Health in providing these certificates.

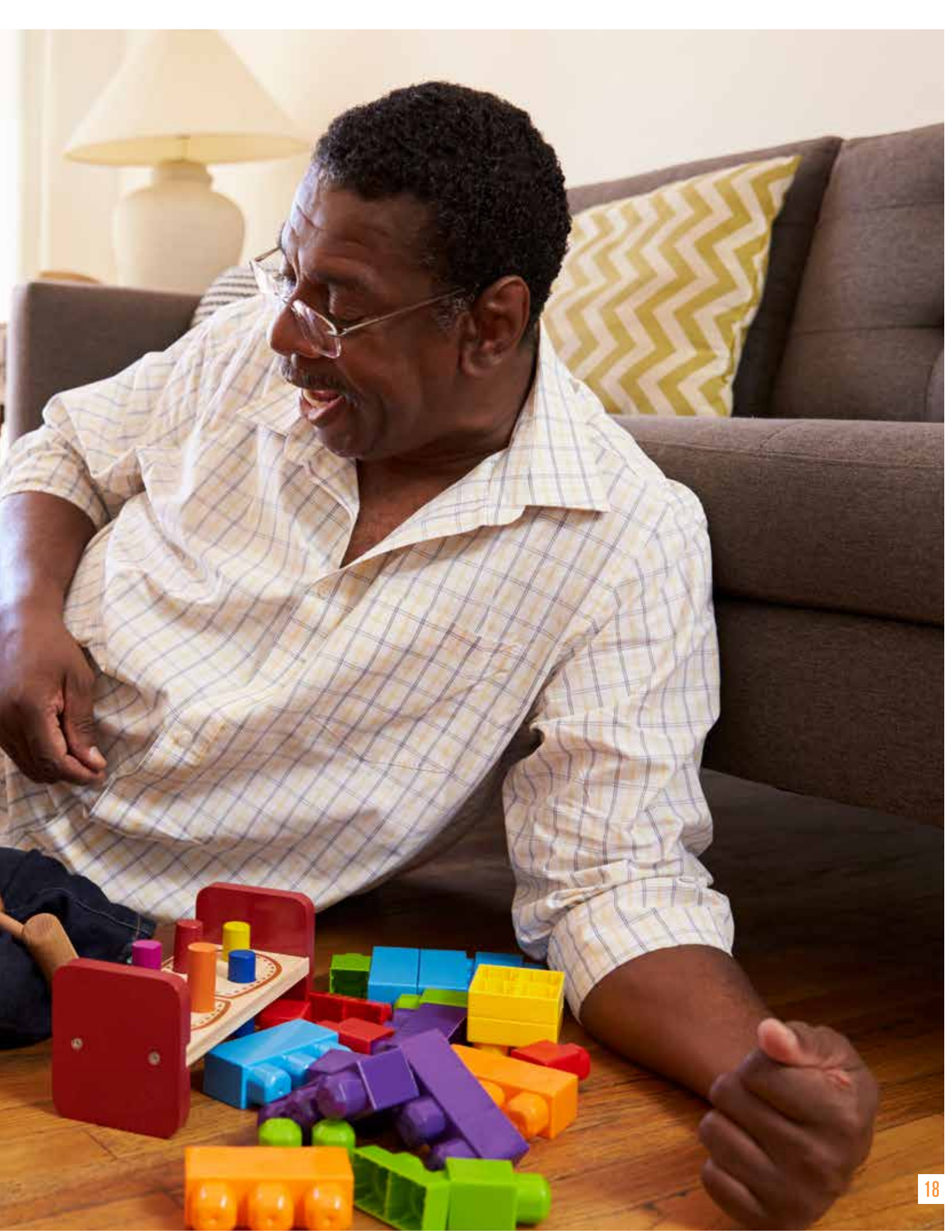
The Vital Records program is a longstanding and key foundational public health service.

Year	Birth Certificates	Death Certificates	Total Certificates
2019	5,005	6,253	11,259
2020	3,776	7,193	10,969
% Change 2019 vs. 2020	-24.6%	15%	-2.6%

Note: Public Health routinely provides multiple certificates to individuals requesting documents, so the figures above are not related directly to the number of births or deaths during any given year.







## GOAL 6: Data, Assessment & Evaluation

From the early stages of the pandemic, it became clear that not everyone would be equally impacted by COVID-19. Those who were essential workers, those without access to sick leave or the ability to work remotely, those who by circumstance lived in more crowded neighborhoods or residences without the ability to isolate or quarantine, and those who had pre-existing barriers to health and wellness were much more heavily impacted.

For these reasons, our 2020-2021 Community Health Assessment (CHA), set to be finalized this summer, has focused heavily on health equity. Simply put, a major priority of our CHA work has focused on ensuring everyone in our community has a fair and just opportunity for healthy living.

The Population Health Trust chose to start its investigation into the state of Skagit's health with community input from populations that have been especially challenged by health inequities. From there, the Trust analyzed common health and wellness

themes brought up by community leaders. The following themes are the focus of Skagit Public Health's 2020-2021 CHA, setting the stage for our work as we move forward:

- Health Equity
- Housing
- Access to Care
- Behavioral Health
- Childcare
- Economic Security
- Food security

These themes will be the foundation for the Trust's next phase of community health assessment this summer, resulting in a comprehensive COVID-19 Recovery Plan.

*“Public Health bases its areas of focus and prioritization on data collected, as well as public input. We need both in order to be truly responsive to the diverse needs of our community.”*

– Jennifer Johnson



## GOAL 7: Organizational Health & Growth



### CAPACITY BUILDING

During the height of the pandemic, most of Public Health's permanent staff had been either partially or fully activated in the County's emergency response. Due to time and staffing necessary to provide case investigation and testing services, Public Health sought to hire new temporary staff to assist with response measures. In partnership with the Skagit Valley Family YMCA, Public Health was able to borrow YMCA staff to add capacity at our COVID-19 Test Site and at the office for case investigation and contact tracing. We are so appreciative of these individuals' time and dedication to this work!



### SKAGIT COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH EXPANSION

Through ordinance of the Skagit County Board of Commissioners, the Skagit County Board of Health expanded from three to five members by the addition of two at-large members. Subsequently, Connie Davis, MD, and Aaron Katz, CPH, joined the Board, providing the broadened expertise necessary to address the increasingly complex and often crucial public health issues faced by Skagit County. By adding two at-large members with health care and public health skill and experience, the Board is able to further evaluate and develop effective public health policies and strategies to address far-reaching issues and improve overall health within Skagit County.



**Connie Davis, MD**, joined Skagit Regional Health as the Chief Medical Officer in 2012 after a long career in nephrology. Dr. Davis previously served as Director of the Kidney Care Line and Co-Director of the Kidney and Pancreas Transplant program at the University of Washington, where she was on faculty at the School of Medicine. Dr. Davis received her medical degree at the University of Washington and went on to residencies and a nephrology fellowship at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School and a research fellowship at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. She is board-certified in internal medicine and nephrology and has a Masters of Health Care Administration from the University of Washington. Dr. Davis is passionate about prevention of society-related health care issues after years of caring for patients with such illnesses. She is excited to be part of the Skagit County Board of Health to help facilitate conversations that lead to action improving the health status of all Skagit County Residents.

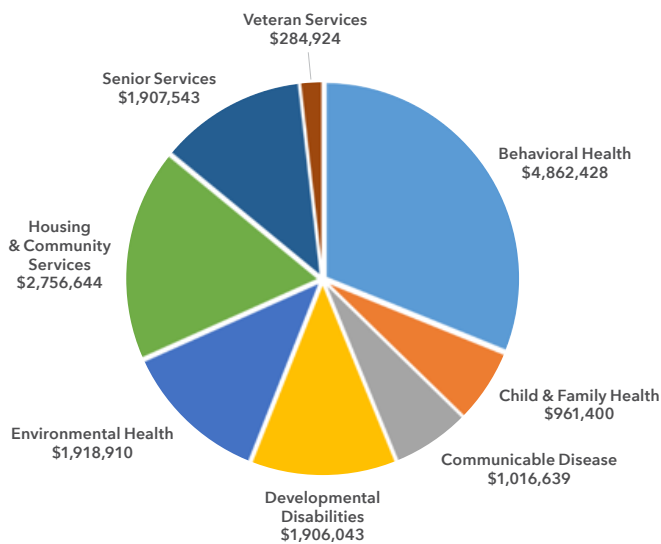


**Aaron Katz** is Principal Lecturer Emeritus at the University of Washington School of Public Health, where he teaches graduate-level courses in health policy and conducts health policy projects and research on a wide variety of issues. During his 32 years at UW, Aaron held numerous academic leadership positions, including as faculty coordinator of the Health Systems and Policy Concentration of the Health Services Master of Public Health (MPH) program; as founding director of the Leadership, Policy, and Management track of the Global Health MPH program; and as co-founder of the Community Oriented Public Health Practice MPH program. He was director of the UW Health Policy Analysis Program from 1988 until 2003; editor-in-chief of the School's journal, *Northwest Public Health*, from 1999 to 2008; and director of the Packard-Gates Population Leadership Program from 2005 to 2009. He was also visiting faculty at the University of Queensland (Australia) School of Public Health. Aaron received the American Public Health Association's Award for Excellence in 2006 and the Outstanding Teaching Award from the UW School of Public Health in 2004. At the 2011 "State of Reform" Washington Health Policy Conference, Aaron received the Health Reform Leadership Award. Aaron has worked in health policy and planning in Washington state since 1978, serving as a health planner, policy and planning consultant, lobbyist, political adviser, and policy researcher. He directed numerous policy analyses and policy development projects for legislative bodies, state and local public agencies, and private sector clients, including work on health system reform, public health reform, managed care, rural access, HIV/AIDS, workers' compensation, long-term care, medical economics, and services for people with low incomes. Aaron also collaborated on health policy projects with colleagues in Japan and various countries in southern Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. Aaron received a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1974 and a certificate (master) of public health degree from the University of Toronto in 1975. Aaron and his artist wife, Kate Dougherty, are happy to have moved to Anacortes in April 2019 after living in Seattle for more than 40 years. They enjoy hiking, biking, pickleball, eating in the area's great restaurants, listen to music and dancing, and—when it's safe again—traveling.

Budgetary and financial management are primary foundational public health business competencies.  
The great majority of department funds originate from governmental sources.

## 2019

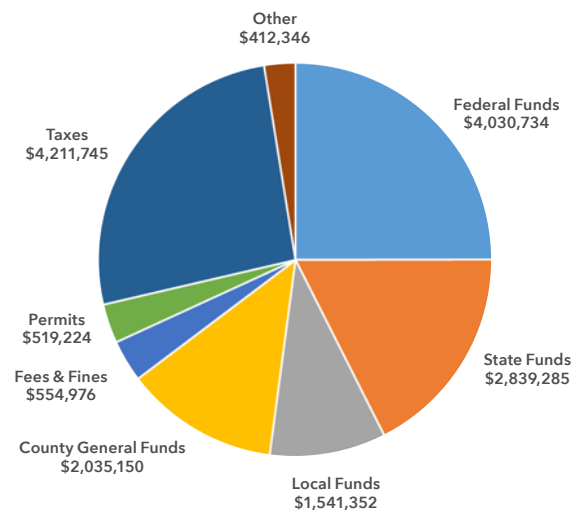
Skagit County Public Health  
2019 Expenses by Program Type



### EXPENSES

Skagit County Public Health operates and funds a wide array of programming. The largest investments in 2019 were more than \$4.8 million in Behavioral Health, approximately \$3.9 million in Public Health Services (noted separately in the above graph as Child & Family Health, Communicable Disease, and Environmental Health), more than \$2.7 million in Housing and Community Development, approximately \$1.9 million for Senior Services, and slightly more than \$1.9 million in Developmental Disabilities.

Skagit County Public Health  
2019 Revenues



### REVENUES

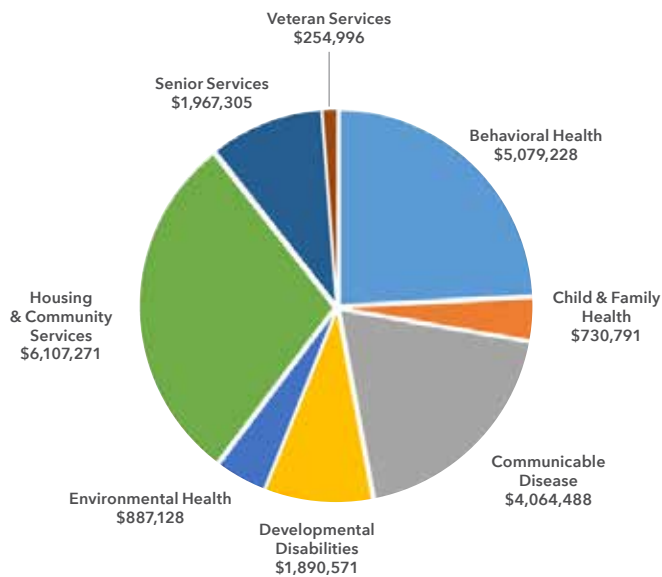
In 2019, the largest sources of funding were taxes at approximately \$4.2 million, federal funds at slightly more than \$4 million, state support at more than \$2.8 million, and county general funds totaling about \$2 million.



PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITIZES CONSCIENTIOUS STEWARDSHIP OF PUBLIC DOLLARS.

2020

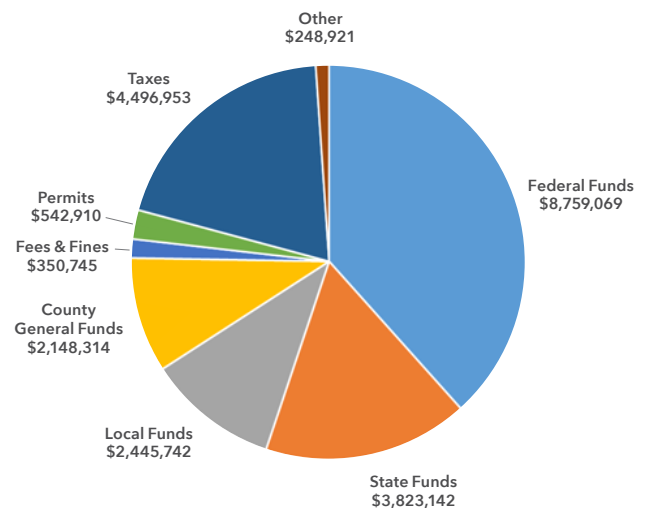
Skagit County Public Health  
2020 Expenses by Program Type



## EXPENSES

Public Health expenses are largely dictated by the availability of dedicated revenue to programming. We actively seek collaboration in all of these areas, either by securing new grants and contracts or through partnering with community organizations to advance their community initiatives and programming when compatible. The COVID-19 pandemic expanded our investments into Communicable Disease and Housing and Homelessness efforts in order to meet the most critical community needs.

Skagit County Public Health  
2020 Revenues

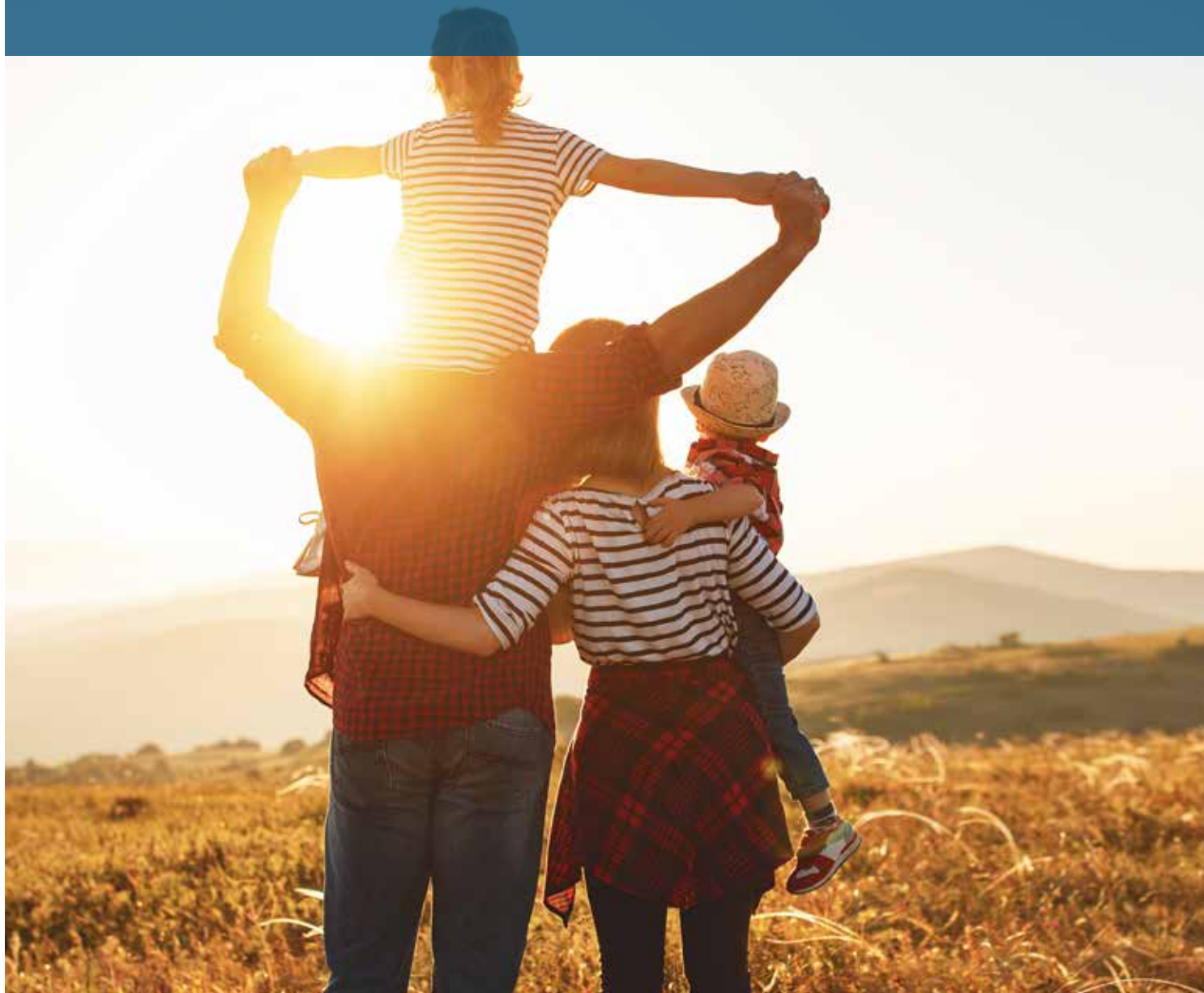


## REVENUES

Public Health receives revenues from a variety of sources (see graph). Federal dollars were the highest means of support for initiatives and programming in 2020, totaling approximately \$8.6 million. State funds were also a significant source of funding at approximately \$3.8 million. These funds were greatly expanded in 2020, advancing Public Health's COVID-19 response, with the federal CARES Act and state grants enabling us to ramp up a wide array of services addressing the community's most critical needs. Taxes were also a significant revenue source (totaling approximately \$4.5 million), but the great majority of these funds—approximately \$3.9 million—is dedicated by state law to behavioral health services (1/10th of 1% sales tax and millage property tax serving as the sources). Lastly, Skagit County contributes a high level of support from County General Funds, totaling approximately \$2.1 million. Public Health is on the constant outlook for non-local funds, which expand much-needed Skagit programs and create innovative initiatives.

## Future Directions

PUBLIC HEALTH PLAYS AN INCREDIBLE ROLE in our society; when done correctly, our work can have a transformative impact on the lives of those we serve. As we work to identify our goals laid out in our upcoming Community Health Assessment and 2021 Strategic Plan, we are well aware that COVID-19 has created a large hill for us all to climb. There is so much work to be done to ensure the best possible health outcomes for all Skagitonians. It is our mission to move forward, to grow in our resilience, and to continue to work with—and for—our community.



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