



# Population Health Trust January Newsletter

January 25, 2021

Every five years, the Population Health Trust (Trust) undergoes a Community Health Assessment (CHA), which is an opportunity for us to analyze the state of our community's health. This is achieved by relying on a vast network of community partners and individual community members to inform us about key trends.

Insight from the newly developed CHA then drives the actions of local leaders, community service organizations, healthcare providers, and Skagit County Public Health, with the goal of improving the health of all of our residents.

Our Trust has been busy working toward a COVID Recovery Plan based on the recent CHA. Even still, our individual Trust members—our leaders for change—have already been engaging in work inspired by the CHA within their organizations and the community!

Over the next couple months, we will be featuring examples of how Trust organizations have already begun putting our CHA themes (Health Equity, Housing, Access to Care, Behavioral Health, Childcare, Economic and Financial Security, and Food Security) into action.

This month, we are featuring Community Action of Skagit County and the North Sound Behavioral Health Administrative Services Organization (BH-ASO). Check out how these organizations are focusing their work on housing, behavioral health, and health equity below!

**Housing:** During the most recent CHA, housing was rated as the highest need among Key Sector Leaders who were interviewed. It was indicated that “without better access to safe, stable, and affordable housing, all other challenges are multiplied.”

Community Action of Skagit County continues to focus their energy on combating the housing crisis in Skagit County. Bill Henkel, Executive Director of SCCAA and long-time Trust Member, stated: “We are addressing housing as a *community health priority*.” Community Action is developing affordable housing with their first project underway—Cascade Landing in Burlington will provide 34-35 apartment units to those in need.

This achievement required a creative partnership between private and nonprofit business, by converting existing and under-utilized commercial office space into residential units. This partnership highlights another value of the Trust: collective action! We are truly stronger and more impactful when we work together and form partnerships across different sectors.

**Behavioral Health:** Every single group of Key Sector Leaders interviewed for the CHA mentioned behavioral health needs as a critical issue. The behavioral health impact from the COVID-19 pandemic

was apparent—fear of disease coupled with job loss, school closures, and social isolation were causing significant problems.

Margaret Rojas from North Sound BH-ASO (and Trust member) has seen some silver linings, however. “One of the unexpected benefits of the COVID-19 pandemic was bringing behavioral health to the forefront. We learned that these issues could affect anyone.”

The North Sound BH-ASO is addressing the behavioral health crisis in a number of ways: they are partnering with Mount Vernon Police Department and the Sherriff’s Office to embed social workers within law enforcement, they are training hundreds of behavioral health peers who can fill the gaps when people are unable to access behavioral health services, and they are advocating on a statewide level to enact policies that retain our current behavioral health workforce.

**Health Equity:** Due the Trust’s evolving equity framework and disparate COVID-19 outcomes, this year’s CHA led with a health equity lens. Part of the data collection process included Deep Dive Equity Panels to get input from individuals representing identified groups.

The equity data released in the CHA inspired the North Sounds BH-ASO to begin their own equity journey within their organization and the behavioral healthcare providers they contract with. They are taking an “inside out” approach by hiring a consultant to provide diversity, equity, and racial justice training and strategic planning with their board and staff. They will then begin the process of working with providers to improve how behavioral healthcare is serving diverse and marginalized communities.

Stay tuned for more organization highlights as we see our CHA come to life! Next month’s newsletter will feature the Skagit Valley Family YMCA and some of our other awesome Trust members!



Thank you for your partnership in keeping Skagit County healthy!

[Population Health Trust](#)

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