

Connecting with Your Legislators

This year WHAA is embarking on our first ever legislative effort to try to get support for free clinics. One strategy is to try to get funding through the state budget. Another is to try to get the statutes (RCW) and associated rules (WAC) modified to provide incentives that will help recruit and retain volunteer practitioners, particularly nurses.

Your help with this effort is critical! Free clinics that serve Washington cover 32 of the 49 legislative districts in the state. If we can build relationships with many of the legislators in whose districts we have clinics, we can increase our chances of obtaining the support we need.

Your role currently is educational. Local legislators' awareness of your clinics will help to build the support we need when it is time for them to vote in committee or on the floor. Here's what you can do.

1. Look at the list of clinics and in which districts they are located. Identify which three legislators are yours. There are two Representatives and one Senator per district.
2. Contact (email is preferable because the hours are less strict at this time of year) the aides of the legislators in whose district you operate and ask for an appointment "in district" for them to come and visit your clinic. Tell the aide you would like a half hour to take the legislator(s) on a tour and describe the work you do and who your clients are. This would preferably occur between November 5 and December 20, before the holidays. If necessary, it could be between New Years Day and January 13, when the session begins. Be sure to thank the legislative aide for their help regardless of whether you succeed in getting the appointment or not.

Explain that the purpose of the visit is to let the legislators know what work you are doing in their district, because they represent this constituency. Express your pride in what you are providing to the community. Your goal is to build a relationship, not to be "lobbying"/advocating at this time.

- a. You may want to suggest that all three come together or one at a time. Or the aides may suggest the group approach. That is harder to schedule, but worth considering.
 - b. The highlighted names are definitely not going to be back for the 2025 session; and we will provide replacements' names after the November 5 election.
 - c. There are a few others in the House that definitely will not be back, but not as many as for the Senate. Some Representatives are running for Senate, so contacting all of them is worth the time.
3. When you have the legislators visit, here are some things to discuss. You will already know most, if not all, of this:
 - a. Ask if they have visited before. Tell them:
 - b. How long the clinic has been operating
 - c. Why it was started (if you know)
 - d. Who provides the facility
 - e. What services you provide
 - f. How many clients/patients you have

- g. Who your clients are (and if possible, some quotes from them about how important your services are to them).
 - h. How many doctors/nurses/dentists you have on staff, and how many are volunteers; if possible, percentage of operating costs provided by using volunteers
 - i. Sources of funding other than in-kind (volunteering)
 - j. Anything that is special about your clinic.
 - k. Express deep appreciation for their interest.
4. Following the visit, within a day or two, send a thank you note to the legislators who visited and thank them and their staff for their time and interest.

Notes:

- Email is the best way to communicate after initial phone calls because it provides a record, there is no delay in receipt, and it's easy for legislators and their staff to respond quickly. The legislators and their staff far prefer email to paper mail.
- If you phone, use the number in the spread sheet for both the legislator and their aide. Do not use the Hotline number that is sometimes disseminated.
- For some situations, where there are a large number of clinics in the same district (particularly in King County), we can help that group of clinics coordinate so that there is not a bombardment of those legislators by so many people at once.
- Contact Christine Lindquist, director@wahealthcareaccessalliance.org, if you have questions or need other help. She will get in touch with Cynthia Stewart as needed.
- Next steps will depend on election results and committee assignments and will be discussed in late November/early December.