

## **WRA 2025 Support Item Legislative Priorities**

Beyond Recovery Advocacy Day priorities, the Washington Recovery Alliance (WRA) also creates a list of legislative and funding support items so that our community members can advocate for these issues with the backing of the WRA. The WRA Public Policy Committee recommends the following legislative and funding support item priorities for the 2025 Washington State Legislative Session:

### **Alignment with Tribal behavioral health priorities**

Last year, Washington State allocated \$85 million to Tribes for opioid-focused treatment, highlighting a commitment to enhancing behavioral health services in Indigenous communities. Aligning with tribal behavioral health policy priorities is crucial to ensure these funds effectively meet the specific needs of these populations and expand access to culturally appropriate care. This support not only addresses substance use challenges but also strengthens the overall capacity of Tribal health systems.

### **Amend the harm reduction language enacted under SB 5536 to address concerns with siting issues and legal protections for harm reduction providers**

SB 5536, also known as the Blake Bill, gives cities and counties the ability to regulate harm reduction services as they see fit, which can include banning certain services. By amending the harm reduction language, we can ensure that harm reduction service providers are legally protected and ensure these lifesaving programs are able to operate.

### **Create in-between spaces, especially housing, for people in recovery who experience return to use or who practice a non-abstinent recovery approach**

Creating in-between spaces, particularly housing options, is vital for individuals in recovery who may experience a return to use or who follow a non-abstinent recovery approach. Effective housing modalities include substance use disorder peer respite, harm reduction models, and peer accountability housing, which can provide supportive environments that acknowledge diverse recovery paths. These options will help ensure that individuals have safe places to live while receiving the necessary support and understanding during their recovery journey.

### **Ensure equity in recovery services**

To ensure equity in recovery services, there is a pressing need for greater availability of culturally responsive behavioral health services and modalities that specifically support queer and TGNC communities, along with an increase in access to beds and a decrease in client costs. Policy discussions must delve deeper into the needs of underserved groups, including LGBTQIA+ individuals and older adults, to create inclusive protections. Additionally, promoting and funding peer organizations that serve BIPOC communities through targeted grants is essential for enhancing representation and support within the recovery landscape.

### **Filling in the harm reduction gap by expanding state funding for health engagement hubs**

To address the harm reduction gap exacerbated by local ordinances that create a barrier to accessing services, it is essential to establish accessible locations where individuals can seek support. Connecting people with low-barrier support such as health engagement hubs is crucial for enhancing public health practices, particularly in rural communities. Health engagement hubs serve as an all-in-one location where people who use drugs can access a range of medical, harm reduction, and social services. Increasing access to this public health service will provide vital resources for those in need and promote safer environments for all.

### **Support efforts to better integrate substance use disorder and mental health services**

There is a pressing need for the integration of mental health and substance use disorder services to effectively address co-occurring behavioral health conditions. Recovery communities throughout the state have expressed the need for a more holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of mental health, substance use, and societal conditions such as homelessness, underscoring the urgency for integrated care solutions for dual diagnoses. By prioritizing policies that support this integration, we can better meet the complex needs of individuals facing these challenges.

### **Support policy recommendations from Safe Supply Work Group report**

Safe supply is defined as a legal and regulated supply of mind or body altering substances that traditionally have only been accessible through illicit markets. Research has shown that safe supply reduces the chance of overdose for those who receive it, promotes safer use over time, increases prosocial engagement with their communities, and reduces theft, petty crime, and syringe litter in certain models. The Safe Supply Work Group was established by the legislature in 2023 to examine potential models for safe supply services and they will produce a report in December 2024 with recommendations on the inclusion of a safe supply framework in the Washington state substance use recovery services plan to provide a regulated, tested supply of controlled substances to individuals at risk of drug overdose. This priority then seeks to support recommendations from that report as a means to reduce the risks associated with substance use, ultimately enhancing safety and health outcomes for individuals in recovery. By adopting safe supply policy, the community can help mitigate the harms of contaminated or adulterated substances, which disproportionately affect vulnerable and underserved populations. Supporting these policies not only aligns with harm reduction principles but also fosters a more compassionate approach to substance use challenges, emphasizing recovery and well-being.

### **Support recovery friendly workplace legislation**

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A recovery friendly workplace (RFW) is an environment that supports employees in their recovery from substance use disorders, mental health conditions, and co-occurring challenges by providing resources, understanding, and policies that promote wellness and inclusion. This priority supports the various legislation that can be created to expand RFW across the state. One approach would be to create a state-led RFW support program that protects businesses that complete the program from liability when hiring people in recovery, shielding them from legal repercussions related to their supportive policies for employees in recovery. Another means to increase this modality is to promote recovery friendly workplaces by providing guidance and resources for employers to support employees in recovery from substance use disorders. These approaches aim to encourage businesses to adopt policies that foster a supportive environment and offer incentives for businesses that participate in the program. By doing so, it seeks to reduce stigma and improve job retention for individuals in recovery.