

## 2020 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

At the **Washington Recovery Alliance (WRA)**, we believe that recovery needs to be a reality for ALL Washingtonians who face mental health and / or substance use challenges. We have identified the following policy priorities for 2020 to help members of our community begin their recovery journey and stay in recovery and reach their fullest potential.

### #1: End the Opioid Distributors Tax Break: [HB 2734](#)

In Washington State, “pharmaceutical distributors” (companies that import large batches of drugs, including opioids, and resell them to local pharmacies) are given [special treatment in our tax code](#). They receive a special discount on certain taxes that other businesses have to pay in full. **That tax break increases the profits of those companies while the state loses nearly \$20 million each year in potential funding for behavioral health.**

This session, our top priority is ending this tax break and dedicating that ~\$20 million per year specifically to treatment and recovery support services not funded by Medicaid. **Instead of helping big pharmaceutical companies and distributors make more profit, those funds should help Washingtonians and their families recover from substance use disorder and mental health challenges.** Examples of programs that could be funded by ending this tax break:

- ★ Certified Recovery Housing: Resources to build and purchase high-quality recovery housing facilities to support people in early recovery
- ★ Recovery Coaching: Funds to launch a WA State Recovery Coaching Network, aggregate and share recovery coaching training opportunities and resources, and create systems for matching recovery coaches with organizations and individuals.

### #2: “No Wrong Door” Inpatient Treatment Accessibility: [HB 2642](#)

Currently, inpatient behavioral health treatment providers require something called insurance preauthorization -- proof that a patient's insurance covers services at a given location -- before that patient can receive care. As a result, patients in need of behavioral health treatment are often turned away when they seek help because of confusing insurance requirements.

HB 2642 would reduce barriers to substance use disorder treatment by not only requiring coverage of those services, but *eliminating* pre-authorization requirements for detox AND residential treatment. This will create a direct pathway to care with “no wrong door” for people seeking treatment for substance use disorders, including those coming from jail or emergency rooms. Everyone deserves fully-covered care when they need it, regardless of confusing insurance networks and regulations.

**In addition to active bills HB 2734 and HB 2642, the WRA supports two other important advocacy areas that affect people in recovery but do not have designated bills in action as of yet:**

## **Clean Slate Criminal Justice Reform**

The WRA is proud to have partnered on the passage of the [WA State New Hope Act](#) during the 2019 legislative session. This bill created a pathway for people with prior convictions who have completed their full sentence to “vacate” their conviction records; making those records invisible on a standard background check. This will make it easier for those folks, to access housing, employment, and other resources and opportunities. Clean Slate Criminal Justice Reforms aim to automate the process of vacating these records, removing the legal obstacles and expenses currently required to apply for vacation. These efforts could result in prior convictions vacated for thousands of members of our recovery community, clearing the way for them to live their most fulfilling lives.

*UPDATE:* [HB 2793](#) was filed on 1/22/2020, which would automate the process of vacating criminal convictions eligible under the New Hope Act. This bill would help reduce barriers to housing and employment for people in recovery - which we know helps people live well, and *stay* in recovery.

## **Behavioral Health Workforce Stabilization**

The strength of the relationship with a behavioral health treatment provider is a key predictor in treatment outcomes. Recruiting and retaining highly qualified behavioral health workers is an ongoing challenge in the field, and contributes to poor outcomes for people who need services. Providers are spread thin trying to meet the demand for services, comply with ever-changing demands of insurance, and struggle to offer competitive wages due to inadequate funding. The WRA advocates for resources to expand and stabilize the behavioral health workforce in our state so that treatment can be more accessible and people in recovery can maintain long-term, trusting relationships with well-trained staff as they pursue their recovery journey.