

The 2021 Legislative Session – Week One

At least every other week during this unprecedented 2021 legislative session we will provide an update to WAFP members, reviewing recent happenings and anticipating what is coming next. We will keep it to just a page or so — short enough to fit into your otherwise hectic schedules, but sufficient to touch on matters of import to family medicine, what we are doing on your behalf, and how you can help. We will embed links for those wanting to know more and hope along the way to provide some insights on how the legislative process in Washington works.

This is in addition to the more detailed discussions we will regularly have with WAFP leadership, including Government Affairs Committee Co-Chairs Dr. Ann Diamond and Dr. Matt Logalbo. This keeps them up to date and provides us with needed guidance on WAFP positions and priorities, particularly regarding legislation [scheduled for public hearing](#) within a given week.

The 2021 session began on Monday, Jan. 11, and under [our state constitution](#) may go no more than 105 days. Typically, opening day would be spent largely on historic traditions, including the swearing-in of legislators elected or re-elected last November. This year, of course, was different. With both the [House](#) and [Senate](#) operating under COVID-19-related protocols, most legislators had already been sworn in remotely and were present in Olympia only to take a socially distanced vote changing legislative rules to allow the remainder of the session to also take place online. That this happened on a Capitol Campus otherwise closed, fenced, and heavily guarded is also something we hope never needs to be repeated.

On Wednesday, Gov. Jay Inslee delivered his [inaugural address](#). It was historic both because he is now one of only two governors in state history to serve three consecutive terms, and because it was [pre-recorded from his office](#) and delivered online, rather than live to a joint session in the House chamber. Among the priorities he identified for the 2021 session were “reimagining public health for the future” and improving the state’s outdated behavioral health system. The governor also drew an explicit connection between health and housing.

Most of the work of the legislature over the next several weeks will occur in the various standing committees, to which bills are initially referred and before which public hearings occur. All hearings will be held remotely, allowing individuals to testify from anywhere they can connect online. Although there were a few hiccups this week, so far it has gone better than we expected. Instructions on how to participate in hearings can be found [here](#), and all committee meetings can be seen live and are archived on [TVW](#), with any accompanying materials available via [the committee website](#).

Committees often spend the first few meetings of each session in “work sessions.” These typically involve invited presentations overviewing relevant state agencies, reporting the results of interim studies, or from experts on issues expected to be taken up later in legislation. Of particular interest this week were presentations before the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee addressing “[Pandemics: past, present and future](#),” and another

one on [“The impact of COVID-19 on health care service delivery.”](#) The latter included a presentation on telehealth and COVID-19 from Dr. Crystal Wong, a family physician and Associate Medical Director at UW Digital Health.

The House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Ways & Means Committee also held public hearings on [Governor Inslee’s proposed 2021-2023 state operating budget](#). State law requires the governor submit a budget proposal in December, which initiates the discussion leading to adoption of the final state budget — likely as one of the last acts of the legislature before it adjourns. WAFP will be monitoring the budget closely as it develops, weighing in particularly regarding public health and health care programs, and programs to support family physician education and training.