

The 2021 Legislative Session: Weeks Six-Seven (February 14 – February 27)

As set out in the [2021 Session Cutoff Calendar](#), within the past two weeks the legislature's primary focus has gone from the policy committees to the fiscal committees to floor action. With some exceptions, by March 9 any bill still under consideration must pass its "house of origin" in order to continue on in the legislative process, i.e., House bills must pass the House, and Senate bills must pass the Senate.

A few of the bills supported by the Academy have already passed their house of origin by a margin sufficient to suggest they'll make it through the opposing chamber and on to Gov. Jay Inslee's desk. Although we'll continue to be on the lookout for unanticipated roadblocks, at least for now WAFP's attention can generally be elsewhere. These bills include: [SB 5068](#), extending postpartum coverage under Apple Health to a full year, which the Senate passed unanimously; and [SB 5140](#), protecting pregnancy and miscarriage-related patient care. While passing the Senate by a less robust 29-20 margin, with the makeup of the House its future too looks good.

Where then should the focus of WAFP members be at this point? A key date in this regard is March 17, which is when the state's updated revenue forecast will be formally released. This is generally the last piece needed before the House or Senate — or both — release their biennial operating budget proposals. This year, it also follows by a few days the target date in D.C. for the latest federal COVID-19 relief bill to be signed into law, which will also have implications for state finances. So, as they wade through the long list of bills up for a floor vote, budget writers in Olympia are also making decisions about what state spending will look like for the next two years.

That means that now is a good time to [be in touch with legislators](#) representing where you live or work asking them to support the WAFP budget priorities listed below, particularly if any of them are on either the [House Appropriations](#) or [Senate Ways & Means](#) committee.

Increase Medicaid primary care rates: [A recent Health Affairs article](#) noted that relative to Medicare, Medicaid primary care rates in Washington were below those of many other states. The governor vetoed a rate increase provided by the 2020 legislature due to concerns over the fiscal impact of COVID-19. The Washington State Medical Association and the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics are among those joining with WAFP in asking that this again be addressed in 2021.

Provide dedicated public health funding. Washington has not had a significant, dedicated source of funding for state and local public health since Initiative 695 passed more than two decades ago. This session, both [SB 5149](#) (a tax on health insurers) and [SB 5371](#) (a tax on sweetened beverages) would provide such funding. Your message to legislators need not focus so much on a particular funding source, but on the general need for stable funding — while noting the close connection between public health and primary care.

Promote investments in primary care. WAFP is supporting a budget proviso to provide a small amount of funding to the Health Care Authority for the continued development and implementation of its [Multi-Payer Primary Care Transformation Model](#). Perhaps most importantly, the proviso will serve as an explicit statement of legislative support and expectation regarding HCA's initiative intended to increase the percentage of overall health care spending in the state devoted to team-based primary care.