



Eastside Human Services Forum Policy 2009 Legislative Agenda

The Eastside Human Services Forum (EHSF) is a nonprofit coalition that builds strong public and private partnerships to assure stable health and human services for East King County residents. EHSF has the following overall objectives:

- advocate for funds to help people in need
- bring people, groups, and services together to maximize resources
- educate and influence decision makers
- proactively impact regional issues

Each year, EHSF develops a work plan with specific objectives based on the most pressing health and human services needs in East King County. Our Legislative Agenda reflects these priorities and is created by reviewing the policy statements developed by partner organizations and assessing them based on our criteria. In addition to being consistent with our mission and policies, the EHSF legislative agenda items must provide an opportunity to advocate for Eastside-specific concerns.

For 2009, the Eastside Human Services Forum has prioritized the following areas in which to advocate for policy changes: (1) Infrastructure and System Support for Sustainable Health and Human Services, (2) Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness, and (3) Affordable, High Quality Childcare and Parent/Caregiver Support.

Infrastructure and System Support for Sustainable Health and Human Services

Costs have been rising steadily as the economy has weakened, leaving families ever more vulnerable and in need of social services. We need collaborative solutions that are sustainable, including revenue sources that are non-regressive and non-cyclical. We urge city, county, and state decision-makers to support viable funding solutions to ensure long-term stability for services that keep our communities healthy and safe.

In addition to sustainable funding, our community must also invest in systems that meet needs successfully and efficiently. The Washington Information Network (WIN) 2-1-1 is an easy-to remember phone number for people to call for health and human service information and referrals and other assistance to meet their needs. This resource has been identified as an important component of the state's emergency preparedness and response efforts. An increase in funding will afford 2-1-1 the capacity to provide after-hours support in case of an emergency.

Number of calls to 2-1-1 in 2008 from East King County residents: 8,692, an 8% increase from 2007.

For More Information:

King County Alliance for Human Services — www.kingcountyalliance.com
The Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEH) — www.cehkc.org
WIN211 — www.win211.org

During this time of elevated need, local jurisdictions are facing significant budget cuts that are threatening to deteriorate our community's ability to keep the human services infrastructure in place.

Eastside Human Services Forum Policy Recommendations:

Give local governments the needed revenue tools to create funding sources for health and human services that are non-regressive, non-cyclical, and sustainable.

\$3 million for the biennium to ensure that Washington Information Network (WIN) 2-1-1 has the capacity for after-hours support in the event of an emergency.

Support Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness

No cities on the Eastside have sufficient affordable housing for families with incomes in the 30-80% range of annual median income. (King County Benchmarks 2006 Affordable Housing Report.) As a result, families must spend a high percentage of their income for housing, which leaves little for other basic needs. Spending more than they can afford on housing puts them at increased risk for homelessness.

The Housing Trust Fund was increased to \$200 million during the 2008 Legislative Session. This was a significant show of support. Continuing this trend is necessary to keep pace with the demand.

East King County has the lowest proportion of affordable housing compared to other regions in King County. Among Bellevue, Redmond and Kirkland, the average percent of rental housing that is affordable to low-income households earning 50% or less of median income is 11.7%, far below the King County average of 46.4%.

The City of Bellevue Needs Update, 2007-2008 reports that: "Demand for homeless housing continues to outpace supply by a wide margin. The East King County Plan to End Homelessness reports a need for 1,845 units of homeless housing (either newly built or obtained from existing rental housing stock). This total considered the homeless population on the Eastside and the current turn-away ratio reported by existing housing programs."

For More Information:

The Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEH) — www.cehkc.org

A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) — www.archhousing.org

Washington Low Income Housing Alliance — www.waliha.org

The Church Council of Greater Seattle — www.thechurchcouncil.org



Lack of affordable housing is a significant problem throughout King County, and is especially apparent in East King County. Washington State provides funding for low-income housing needs through the Housing Trust Fund (HTF). These monies help local housing providers develop affordable housing throughout the state.

Eastside Human Services Forum Policy Recommendations:

Adequately fund the Housing Trust Fund to keep pace with the need.

Along with affordable housing, short-term rental assistance and support systems are required to help homeless people transition into stable housing. These services also aid those at risk of homelessness, providing cost-effective prevention. Invest in proven programs (i.e., the Transitional Housing, Operating and Rent program) to both maintain existing services and expand to address the gaps that remain.

Affordable, High Quality Childcare and Parent/Caregiver Support

Investing in the quality of child care and early learning opportunities lays the foundation for a strong workforce and a healthy economy. However, a survey conducted by the State Office of Public Instruction found that over 50% of children entering kindergarten arrive unprepared to learn.

Ensuring that childcare is affordable is equally important as the quality of the care available. Average costs for child care are higher in East King County than anywhere else in King County. Infant care averages \$1,192/month compared to \$956/month in South King County. (*Child Care Resources, Child Care Facilities and Rates in King County, January 22, 2008*).

Healthy Start is a home visiting program that provides parenting education and support to young, first time parents in East and North King County. Research has found prevention and early intervention approaches such as Healthy Start are key strategies to address risk factors that families face. Data shows that supporting families decreases incidents of child abuse and neglect, and later, prevents children's involvement in the criminal justice system. In King County, birth rates have increased from 19.2 to 20.7 births/1000 for teen moms. Healthy Start referrals are up 37% from 2007, and enrollment has increased 25%. For the first time in its 15 years of service delivery, Healthy Start has started a wait-list for families wanting to get into the program.



Family, friends and neighbors (FFN) provide care for an estimated 60,000 children in King County. For 28,000 of those children, they are the primary source of care when parents are working or attending school. Programs, such as Play and Learn Groups, are neighborhood based, free, and available to FFN who speak a number of languages other than English. In East King County, there are eight Play and Learn groups, conducted in Spanish, Hmong, Chinese, and Japanese, in addition to English.

For More Information:

United Way/SOAR – www.uwkc.org/soar
Children's Alliance – www.childrensalliance.org
Early Learning Action Alliance Contact: Leslie Dozono,
leslie@childrensalliance.org
WAEYC ("The Collaborative") – www.waeyc.org

Preliminary results from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) survey in the Bellevue School District show that 29.6% (up from 26.3% as reported in 2005) of kindergarten children in the Bellevue School District were considered vulnerable in at least one category of school readiness and 14.1% (up from 11.7%) had problems in at least two. The five areas of readiness measured were: 1) physical health and well-being; 2) emotional maturity; 3) social competence, 4) language and cognitive skill, and 5) communication and general knowledge.

The Federal Reserve estimates there is as much as a \$17 return for every \$1 invested in quality early learning opportunities in terms of higher graduation rates, better job skills, reduced welfare and reduced criminal justice costs.

Eastside Human Services Forum Policy Recommendations:

Increase Home Visiting funds to serve more families at or below 185% of Federal Poverty Level so that services can keep up with the 25% increase in enrollment and decrease the waitlist..

Help close the gap between child care subsidy rates and the actual costs of adequate child care to contribute to a strong workforce.

Provide support for parent/caregiver support programs, such as home visiting and Family, Friends and Neighbors Play and Learn groups to increase every child's chance to start school ready to learn.

Issues to Monitor

The Eastside Human Services Forum has identified three other issues that it will monitor in the 2009 session and provide support as needed:

- **Cover All Kids by 2010:** Ensure that the Legislature keeps its commitment to Cover All Kids. Ensure funding for expansion from 250%-300% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- **Feeding Hungry Kids Act:** Eliminates the lunch co-pay for families with kids in pre-K and 4-12th grade. Transfers families who qualify from “reduced” to “free” lunch program.
- **Naturalization Assistance:** The Washington New Americans is an initiative calling for \$2 million annually for naturalization assistance, along with the development of a public-private Statewide Policy Council to provide recommendations for immigrant policy.

For more information about the Eastside Human Services Forum,
please visit www.eastsideforum.org or call: 425-587-3324.