

HEALTH CARE

Governor Gregoire believes that every Washington family deserves access to high-quality, affordable health care. This is a necessity if we want our families to be secure, our businesses to be competitive and our state budget to be sustainable. Governor Gregoire is excited about Washington's potential to serve as the national model for providing high-quality, affordable health care for every American. Already, national experts are taking notice of what Washington is accomplishing by tackling sources of our health care challenges.



In the 2007–09 biennial budget, the Governor focused on the quality and affordability of health care in Washington. She expanded access to health care coverage for 38,500 additional children to take us closer to her goal of covering all kids by 2010. Since Governor Gregoire took office, 84,000 more children now have access to health insurance. She rolled out a new prescription drug card that has saved Washingtonians more than \$1.8 million and covered prescription drug co-pays for 49,000 low-income seniors a month. In addition, she signed the Blue Ribbon Commission Health Care bill, which implemented more than 20 initiatives to improve health care in this state. This includes funding to better manage chronic illnesses such as diabetes, and to help give patients and providers real-time access to their medical records.

This year, Governor Gregoire is tackling another fundamental issue with our health care system: patient safety. This is the next logical step in the road to reform. All Washingtonians deserve safe, high-quality health care. They rightfully expect their health care providers to be well qualified and, above all, do no harm. We must ensure that health care is safe, effective and well-coordinated.

Governor Gregoire intends to improve patient safety by increasing the licensing and oversight standards of providers practicing in our state, expanding investigations of health care complaints, and using technology to reduce medication errors.

Governor Gregoire's Budget for Health Care:

Ensures that all health care providers are well qualified. The Governor's budget will strengthen the state's standards for licensing and oversight of health care providers. This includes funding for national criminal background checks for all out-of-state applicants seeking to become licensed health care providers in our state. This will result in an estimated 13,500 background checks per year to ensure patient safety. *(\$930,000 various accounts)*

Investigates complaints against health care providers. To ensure that patient complaints are addressed in a timely manner, the Governor's budget will fund a 30 percent increase in investigations of health care providers. It continues a successful initial investment made last year that resulted in a 72 percent reduction in outstanding cases. *(\$2.0 million Health Professions Account)*

Provides real-time information to reduce medication errors. To reduce the risk of adverse drug reactions, particularly for our seniors taking multiple medications, the Governor's budget will fund a new, online database that lists for providers and pharmacists all the prescription drugs their patients are receiving. *(\$1.4 million GF-State)*

Increases the licensing standards for registered counselors. The Governor's budget will improve the quality of counseling services by increasing the education and experience standards for counselors in Washington state. *(\$558,000 Health Professions Account)*

Continues support for family planning services. Washington's Take Charge program expands Medicaid coverage for family planning services. Program goals are to reduce unintended pregnancies and to reduce state and federal Medicaid expenditures for births from unintended pregnancies and their associated costs. More than 20,000 people have lost eligibility for certain services as a result the tightening of eligibility rules by federal authorities. Additional state funding for family planning will restore service to nearly 10,000 clients and help the state avoid higher costs associated with unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted disease infections among underserved populations. *(\$5.0 million GF-State)*

Restores core public health functions. Federal budget cuts have resulted in reduced funding for core public health programs in Washington. State funding will be provided to support critical functions such as coordinated care for children with maxillofacial birth defects and other anomalies, monitoring of children and adults with phenylketonuria (PKU), and early intervention for young children with developmental delays. *(\$590,000 GF-State)*

Provides support for early hearing interventions. State support will be provided to replace the loss of federal funding for the Early Hearing-Loss Detection Diagnosis and Intervention program. This funding will enable the program to continue to support hearing screening surveillance and tracking to ensure all infants receive hearing screening, and those with hearing loss are referred to appropriate services. Without timely diagnostic and early intervention services, children are at risk for losing critical language development which can result in learning delays. *(\$325,000 GF-State)*

Creates the Parkinson's disease state registry. To increase participation in ongoing research efforts related to Parkinson's disease, the Department of Health will help support and promote voluntary participation in the state Parkinson's disease registry. The registry will provide researchers access to 5,000 patients currently suffering from Parkinson's but unaware of studies and clinical trials of new treatments. *(\$275,000 GF-State)*