

2024 BUDGET SUPPLEMENTAL DEPARTMENTAL QUESTIONS
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

STRATEGIC GOALS

- 1. *Provide your 2023 strategic goals; how are they different from 2022? In what way, if at all, are your strategic changes demonstrated in your budget request?***

The mission of the Snohomish County Human Services Department remains to help all persons meet their basic needs and develop their potential by providing timely, effective human services and building community.

Our 2024 strategic goals that align with this mission are outlined below.

Ensure every Snohomish County community member has a place to call home. While this has been a longstanding goal, it continues to be impacted by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing loss of low-rent housing. We have utilized hotel/motel vouchers to address this issue in the short term and have collaborated with cities, law enforcement, the Office of Recovery and Resiliency (ORR), and Facilities and Fleet to create longer-term solutions. We have continued to collaborate with the City of Everett on their pallet shelter pilot program as well. We are also continuing our work with the Department of Emergency Management, the Health Department, the network of cold weather shelter providers, and other partner agencies to create a year-round network for disaster sheltering as needed due to weather events. This year, a key focus will be on implementing the Housing and Behavioral Health Capital Fund Implementation Plan.

Ensure every Snohomish County community member has access to critical behavioral health services. This, too, has been a longstanding goal but it has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Our 2024 budget includes additional funding to address pandemic-related behavioral health needs in conjunction with ORR. In 2021, we worked with a host of partners to establish two 16-bed treatment facilities in repurposed space in the Denney Juvenile Justice Center and have been continuing our work with State and local elected officials to create another evaluation and treatment facility in repurposed space in the City of Lynnwood Jail. We are also working on expanding our community outreach efforts utilizing Designated Crisis Responders and the Snohomish County Outreach Team. New areas of emphasis in 2024 are participating in the Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) group and the utilization of opioid settlement funds to support the launch of a mobile opioid treatment program and collaborating with county and city partners on additional near and long-term strategies to address the fentanyl crisis in our county. As noted above, a key focus will be on implementing the Housing and Behavioral Health Capital Fund Implementation Plan as well as construction of behavioral health facilities with ARPA and CDMH funds.

Ensure every Snohomish County community member in need of long-term services and supports has access to high quality services that support their optimal self-determination. This has been a longstanding strategic goal as well. We have utilized surge funding to increase access to home delivered meals as well as congregate meals delivered using pandemic-specific protocols. We have increased discharge planning services to support individuals returning to their own homes with the supports needed to maintain independence. We have launched new programming and have adapted to changes

in state policies and procedures regarding the matching of individuals in the Case Management program with care providers. Finally, we will collaborate with the Community Foundation of Snohomish County to enhance the capacity of senior-serving agencies to serve as “anchor” community centers and collectively address social isolation through tailored strategies.

Ensure every Snohomish County family with children has access to the developmental and intergenerational services needed to ensure the healthy development of all family members. This longstanding strategic goal has also been profoundly impacted by the pandemic since in person services to families had to transition to remote delivery and have now partially transitioned back to in-person and hybrid service delivery models. We coordinate with the Health Department to monitor for the need for additional pivoting as a new variant surges. Children in early learning programs frequently lack access to the Internet, an essential condition for remote learning. Despite the numerous challenges and concerns about children returning to classrooms, we’re seeing high participation rates in learning activities and parents have remained engaged in continuing to enhance their skills as children’s first teachers. We are continuing our work with ORR and the Opportunity Council to increase the resiliency of the child care/early learning industry as a whole given its key role in family and economic recovery and are continuing to develop and strengthen the focus on youth of all ages. We are also working with ORR on the construction of new early learning facilities. We will continue our focus with school districts and institutions of higher education in the Regional Transit Authority area on enhancing educational outcomes with PSTAA funding as well.

Ensure we are continuing to strive toward creating a gold standard Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Program. This is being accomplished through enhanced volunteer recruitment, onboarding, training, and retention support. This volunteer-powered program was profoundly impacted by the loss of volunteers during the pandemic coupled with court backlogs. Through the ongoing tireless efforts of the CASA team, we have been able to increase volunteer recruitment and retention and address backlog issues while receiving national recognition for our efforts. These efforts will continue and be enhanced in 2024 with the creation of a sensory room for children.

Ensure we are equitably reaching vulnerable populations with services designed to meet their needs in a strengths-based, trauma-informed, and individuals/household-centered fashion. We have also expanded and enhanced services to all populations furthest from opportunity with a focus on ensuring the services provided centered the unique needs of each individual or household served and that the services build on the strengths of each individual or household. Many of the individuals and households we serve have experienced significant trauma in their lives, trauma which impacts the effectiveness of the services being offered. Human Services is continuing to implement a department-wide effort to enhance the knowledge and tools used by each department staff member to ensure we support the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels of the department and operate in a trauma-informed manner at the individual client, community, and departmental levels. This is being coupled with peer-led activities to increase staff resiliency and race equity awareness. In 2024, these efforts will be more fully integrated across the department with the guidance and support of our new DEI Planner.

Ensure all services are delivered in a compliant fashion while optimizing efficiency, excellence, and equity. The entire Human Services team utilizes the continuous improvement tools and learnings to advance the Executive’s aim of reducing waste and optimizing efficiency so we can provide excellent customer service to Snohomish County community members. We are also utilizing the knowledge and

awareness gained regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion through the efforts of the Executive Office of Social Justice and the tools being implemented by Central Human Resources as well. We are using the knowledge gained to enhance our support of the network of service providers with which we work while ensuring compliance with federal and state funder requirements to meet the human services needs of all Snohomish County communities to the benefit of us all.

Our 2024 budget request reflects these ongoing strategic goals with a focus on moving from response to recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic including the positions needed to ensure we make optimal use of ARPA funds consistent with the findings of ORR from their facilitated recovery discussions with community partners and mayors and their recovery roadshows.

NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL LANDSCAPE

1. What federal, state, local issues are facing your work? What risks or opportunities does that create for you in 2023 and beyond? What is your plan to leverage the opportunity or mitigate the risk? What support do you need?

Human Services is funded almost exclusively by grants and local resources dependent on the generation of taxes and fees. Given the current economic conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are continuing to see a surge in short-term funding coupled with a long-term trend in year-over-year resource reductions as needs in the community continue to grow. The short-term surge funding, however, is far more restrictive than was the initial funding provided in 2021, resulting in extensive retooling by County staff and our community partners to ensure compliance with the legislation. In some instances, these compliance requirements are extremely onerous, impacting the amount we must spend to administer the programs and forcing us to take down and retool the service delivery “production lines” on a regular basis.

Some of the growth in need relates specifically to having to respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic as the resources to do so continue to decline. However, some relates to the continued fraying of our human services ecosystem which did not begin with the pandemic but is being exacerbated by it.

At the federal level, at the time of this writing, the federal government has begun operating on a 45 day Continuing Resolution (CR), that is, it does not have a budget for the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) will began on October 1, 2023. If both Houses of Congress are unable to pass all 12 appropriations bills to ensure ongoing operations by mid-November, our operations will continue, essentially, on the equivalent of a month-to-month lease. This creates great uncertainty for staff, our subcontractors, and the people we serve. It also takes a tremendous amount of staff time to develop and communicate plans for multiple potential scenarios. We have reviewed every “upline” contract including federal funds to determine which programs can continue beyond the end of the CR without either a new CR or a federal budget and have worked with the Executive Office and Finance on appropriate messaging and ensuring cash flow for ongoing programs that may not be able to draw down federal funds to support staff and our vast network of contractors. Should operations be disrupted at the federal level, a shutdown would result in state and county staff and our partners having to do a tremendous amount of technical work to keep resources flowing and services operating. At times, services could be disrupted under such circumstances despite our best state and local efforts.

At the federal level, legislation that has been proposed to mitigate the long-term disinvestment trend on human services investments has not passed and it is unclear at the time of this writing whether such legislation will be introduced and passed and, if so, in what form. At the state level, there has been an increase in investment in human services but it is unclear what level of investment will be sustained, for how long, and with what parameters.

There are a number of existing mandates that are already underfunded, a situation that may be exacerbated by current and future budget decisions although thus far, we have been seeing a recognition of this fact and attempts to address it at the state level.

The ability of the Human Services Department to advance our work in the behavioral health and housing arenas will be substantially advanced by Council's passage of the 1/10 of 1% sales tax authorized under HB 1590 which will fund the Housing and Behavioral Health Facilities Capital Fund should Council appropriate those resources in the 2024 budget. In that instance, we anticipate being able to begin implementing a Council-approved plan in 2024.

2. What, if any, new mandates do you have impacting your work? Are they funded or unfunded? What is the plan for accomplishing the work?

There have been no major changes in the mandates impacting the work of the Human Services Department other than those noted above. We plan to continue utilizing our existing structure and staffing to accomplish the work. The major challenge we faced in 2023 of recruiting employees for key positions has abated somewhat and we are able to provide more services to more residents with the resources in hand as a result. Consistent with national trends, recruitment of staff for key positions in the behavioral health and child care arenas, among others, continues to impact the ability to provide services for providers and the ability to return to work for individuals. We continue to collaborate closely with the Executive Office, ORR, and Central Human Resources to address these challenges.

PROGRAMS

1. List programs, projects, and services within your department funded through federal COVID/ARPA funds. What, if any, of those programs are you recommending for ongoing funding and what is the source of the ongoing funding?

ORR will be providing a presentation on the proposed use of ARPA funds for all departments. Great effort has been made to create legacy capital projects that enhance our county's long-term resiliency. However, many critical services cannot be sustained once the ARPA and other surge funds cease. We would recommend that services in the following categories be prioritized for continuation to the extent possible: (1) emergency services, (2) other basic needs services, (3) prevention services, and (4) community information lines such as 2-1-1.

2. For programs funded by COVID/ARPA funds, detail the plan to close out and/or transition those programs to an ongoing funding source in 2025 and beyond.

As noted above, the majority of programs currently being operated began being phased out in 2023 and will continue being phased out in 2024. It is critical during this process that we maintain excellent communications with staff and contractors so all are able to provide a consistent message to the individuals served. We engage with the County's PIO team to ensure these messages are more widely

distributed as appropriate. Two new ongoing funding mechanisms that will help address the challenge of the precipitous loss of federal surge funds are the Housing and Behavioral Health Capital Fund and the opioid settlement funds, the latter being administered with guidance from the MAC. It is critical to note, however, that our county and, indeed, our nation, are already experiencing profound impacts. The extension of the federal Child Tax Credit, for example, reduced the number of children in our nation living in poverty by 50 percent. The cessation of that credit is already dramatically reversing those gains. The same is true in other arenas such as rental evictions which are climbing as a result of the end of emergency rental assistance funds coupled with the end of the eviction moratorium and the requirement that mediation be utilized before the filing of a notice of eviction for cause.

3. *What new programs are you launching for 2024? What need or efficiency is the new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?*

While there are other new programs being launched, the primary new programming is in the areas of housing and behavioral health to accelerate the construction of emergency and permanent affordable housing and behavioral health facilities using HBs 1406/1590 and opioid settlement funds as described above. Both funds provide for long term sustainability. In the case of the former, there is no sunset date. For our grant funded programs, the metrics of effectiveness are determined by our funders. The proposed metrics for the new 1/10 of 1% sales tax program have been included in the recently submitted Housing and Behavioral Health Capital Fund Investment Plan.

4. *If different than #3, what are your areas of significant investment? What are you not doing because of that investment?*

Does not apply.

INTERNAL OPERATIONS

1. *What is your department doing to streamline processes or delivery services in a new way? How do your budget allocation requests play into these innovations? Are there ways in which a different budget approach, e.g., several departments sharing a resource, could achieve the same or better results in a more cost-effective way?*

Employees are continuing to work in on flexible, hybrid work schedules with increased access through have moved to their planned in-office or hybrid work schedules and we have implemented a number of sustainable efficiencies in the process. One example is that we have streamlined processes in our energy assistance programs with documents being exchanged remotely in most instances, creating efficiencies for staff and customers. In some instances, our federal and state funders have had us return to more in-person services. In such instances, we are utilizing the efficiencies associated with the use of technology developed during the pandemic as part of the way we are conducting business to the benefit of County residents. We know that the expansion of broadband infrastructure is critical to this process and are working with other county departments and our partners who currently have limited broadband capacity to support them in the delivery of services.

Both as a result of the pandemic and growing community need, the Human Services Department has had to lead with innovation and streamlined processes in the delivery of services to Snohomish County

community members in every aspect of our work. Frequently, we have had to do so in the absence of federal or state guidance and have had to adjust when that guidance was made available.

In terms of housing and community services, Snohomish County is a national leader and is one of a handful of Continuums of Care in the nation to be designated as a Unified Funding Agency for our innovations in addressing homelessness. This designation has allowed us to assume more local control of funding processes and service delivery while attracting more federal resources to our county.

While jurisdictions throughout the nation have struggled to make emergency rental assistance available to eligible households in need, Snohomish County led the way in making resources available to families with the help of our traditional and non-traditional community partners and was able to obtain reallocated resources as a result.

In the arena of early learning and developmental disabilities, we have been recognized as a leader in helping our educational partners achieve distinction as operating “high achiever” programs.

Washington State ranks #2 in the nation in the delivery of long-term services and supports and Snohomish County is recognized as a leader throughout the state.

In the arena of behavioral health, Snohomish County has built out a continuum of integrated law enforcement/human services programming that is without parallel in the nation and includes components such as the Carnegie Resource Center, the Diversion Center, Jail Transition Services, continuity of substance use disorder services for individuals upon release from the Jail, and collaborative street outreach. Our involvement in this work continues to grow through the strategic planning activities currently being conducted by the MAD.

In this and other health and human services efforts, our partnership with the Health Department has grown as have our efforts to address emergency needs in conjunction with the Health Department, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Department of Emergency Management through collaborative planning efforts being led by our Executive Director.

As a department funded largely by grants from federal and state partners and highly dependent on processes they establish, our budget approach is greatly impacted by other entities. Within that context, the Department is always examining opportunities to collaborate with other departments and has done so extensively, including those listed above as well as Fleet and Facilities, Finance, Central Human Resources, and the Executive’s Office. We have also engaged extensively in enterprise-wide efforts with the Office of Recovery and Resiliency and the Office of Social Justice. Our study of best and most promising practices around the nation, and in some instance, the world, supports our pursuit of continuous improvement which, in turn, helps us achieve more and do a better job of meeting community member needs. This does not always translate into faster – our focus is on using data and metrics to determine if we are achieving the desired outcomes and continuously reengineering programming as indicated.

Much of the work we accomplish is through our partnership with community organizations. We work with those partners to build their capacity and strengthen the resiliency of our countywide human services network. It is through the use of these supportive processes that the Human Services team, in collaboration with the Community Foundation of Snohomish County and our network of community partners, is able to optimize our ability to achieve our mission and strategic goals year after year.

2. *What, if any, hiring challenges are you experiencing? How is that affecting your level of service or internal operations? How are you mitigating those operational challenges and/or what is your plan for recruitment?*

The Human Services Department is not immune from the hiring challenges facing all industries or the specific hiring challenges faced by other health and human services organizations throughout the nation. Direct services positions have been particularly impacted in the areas of behavioral health, child care/early learning, and capital project development and management but we have been able to work collaboratively with Central Human Resources to streamline the processes for opening and closing positions and have redistributed work and enhanced staffing within our Administrative Services Division to improve recruitment and are seeing more applicants, and a more diverse pool of qualified applicants, for positions as a result. We have been able to mitigate the impact of this challenge through the amazing work of a committed, dedicated, and highly experienced team of human services professionals working in direct service delivery, oversight of contractors, and administrative services. It has been and remains my distinct honor to work with this profoundly capable team who help ensure that we are able to address many of the needs of our county's most vulnerable residents year after year.

3. *To help inform Council on experiences around hiring and retention, please provide a list of all vacant position titles, position codes, FTE amount (1.0, 0.5, etc.) date vacated, and date first posted.*

This list is provided in a separate attachment.

4. *What effect has the increase of inflation and/or supply chain issues had on your department? What, if any, services or projects have you had to adjust to accommodate for this?*

As a department delivering human services, we have not been significantly impacted by inflation and/or supply chain issues other than through the challenges recruiting workers as identified above with one exception. Our capital projects are being impacted by these challenges and we are seeing delays and cost overruns for many, although not all, as a result. We are working closely with the entities facing these challenges to amend contracts as needed and are working with our state and local partners on resource allocation options to ensure all the capital projects we are helping fund are able to proceed to completion.

5. *When was the last time your department implemented a fee increase? Do you have any plans to increase fees?*

Does not apply.

6. *Do you have any plans to do a rate/fee study? Are your current fees established based on a full cost recovery model?*

Does not apply. However, it is the intent of the Department to ensure we negotiate contracts with our funders to fully cover the cost of providing the contracted services. As a result, year-over-year, we request very few General Funds to support overall operations.

SUCSESSES

1. *Take this opportunity to share to significant success in your department over this past year. What made it a success?*

It is a challenge to name just one success given that every division in the Human Services Department has been able to achieve so much for so many during one of the greatest human services crisis in a century. I will highlight one particular success, and that is the successful resettlement of hundreds of Afghan and Ukrainian refugee families over the past two years. I personally began being engaged in refugee resettlement work in the summer of 1975 and have never seen a resettlement process that has been as effective as this most recent example. There were so many contributing factors.

First, was the leadership of Council, Executive Somers, and the entire Executive Office. The vision of the current Chief of Staff, Alessandra Durham, for creation of the Welcome Center was instrumental in our ability to provide a welcoming environment for these newcomers to our county. She also ensured we were in close communication with our Federal and State delegations at every step of the process so they could help address our resource and policy needs. Our Executive Director, Lacey Harper, also provided tremendous leadership and ensured we had a path forward and the means of addressing every barrier.

Secondly, this success was made possible by the skill and expertise in management of Federal and State funded programs of our Human Services team. We could not have effectively administered the funds available to us under circumstances that were, at times, challenging without them. It is the hallmark of true professionals that they are able to make the near impossible look easy and Nate Marti, Tyler Verda, Mike Liddicoat, Lori Corbray, and a host of other team members did just that.

So many community partners came together to make this effort a success. The Community Foundation of Snohomish County was there, as they always are, to mobilize resources for immediate needs. The City of Everett was incredibly responsive in making facilities available when requested by Volunteers of America Western Washington who then ran the facility with great efficiency and effectiveness. The commitment and expertise of the team members at Volunteers of America Western Washington and Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest is, in my experience, without parallel. Their teams brought tremendous knowledge and compassion as well as resources to meet this challenge. They were at SeaTac Airport at 1:00 in the morning to meet incoming families and were available 24/7 to meet myriad needs. They also coordinated the work of many other health, human services, legal assistance, and faith community partners who brought committed volunteers to the Center week after week to meet new arrivals' needs. And, many, many landlords offered homes to the new arrivals at their request. The Snohomish County Sheriff's Office ran an incredibly successful and well-organized resource drive which met the need for everything from diapers to bicycles.

I apologize in advance for not being able to mention everyone who dedicated so much to this effort. This success was truly a community effort, one that was built on years of collaboration, respect, expertise, and trust among all involved and is a sterling example of what makes Snohomish County so special.