

**2025-2026 BUDGET SUPPLEMENTAL DEPARTMENTAL QUESTIONS**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

STRATEGIC GOALS

**1. Provide your 2025-2026 strategic goals; how are they reflected 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 2025-2026 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 loss of COVID-19 pandemic-related funding and the ongoing loss of low-rent housing. We have utilized hotel/motel vouchers and have been making other investments in pallet housing, congregate and non-congregate shelter, permanent supportive housing, and affordable housing to address this issue in both the short and long-term and have collaborated with cities, law enforcement, the Office of Recovery and Resiliency (ORR), and Facilities and Fleet on those longer-term solutions. We are also continuing our work with the Department of Emergency Management, the Health Department, libraries, senior centers, and the network of cold weather shelter providers, and other partner agencies to create a year-round network for disaster sheltering as needed due to climate conditions. In 2025 and 2026, a key focus will continue to be on implementing the Housing and Behavioral Health Capital Fund Investment 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 2025-2026 budget includes ongoing funding to address a wide range of behavioral health needs. In 2025, the City of Lynnwood will be opening a new behavioral health facility funded, in part, with 1/10 of 1% Chemical Dependency and Mental Health Sales Tax (CDMH) funds from Snohomish County. We have expanded our community outreach efforts utilizing Designated Crisis Responders and the Snohomish County Outreach Team. In 2025-2026, we will take a lead role in using 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 1/10 of 1% Affordable Housing and Behavioral Health Sales Tax (AHBH) capital 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 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. In 2025-2026, we hope to continue to

work with the State of Washington to implement WA Cares which will provide long-term care insurance to all residents and have reflected the launch of that critical service in our budget.

**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 have coordinated with the Health Department to monitor for the need for additional pivoting as new COVID-19 variants emerge and other infectious diseases surge. Children in early learning programs frequently lack access to the Internet, an essential condition for remote learning. We're continuing to see high participation rates in learning activities and parent engagement in enhancing their skills as children's first teachers. We are continuing our work with ORR and the Opportunity Council to increase the resiliency of the childcare/early learning industry as a whole given its key role in family and economic resiliency 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 which we anticipate will break ground in 2025. 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 and CDMH 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 2025 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 2025, these efforts will be more fully integrated across the department with the support of our DEIB Planner working in close collaboration with the Executive Office of Social Justice (OSJ).

**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, inclusion, and belonging through the efforts of OSJ 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 2025-2026 budget request reflects these ongoing strategic goals with continuation of our focus on moving from COVID-19 pandemic response to recovery to resilience including the positions needed to ensure we make optimal use of ARPA and other surge funding streams 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 critical issues are you facing in your department/industry and how are you addressing them?***

We plan to continue utilizing our existing structure and staffing to accomplish this work. A major challenge we face in 2025 and 2026 continues to be the recruitment and retention of employees for a wide range of positions. Consistent with national trends, recruitment of staff for key positions in the housing, behavioral health, aging and disability services, and childcare arenas, among others, continues to impact the ability to provide services to the individuals we serve directly as well as to our network of providers. We continue to collaborate closely with the Executive Office, ORR, OSJ, and Central Human Resources to address these challenges.

**2. *Are there federal, state, local issues/mandates that will impact your department operationally and/or fiscally? Please address what it(they) is(are), the anticipated impact, and how you plan to mitigate it(them).***

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 winding down of COVID-19 pandemic surge funding, we are laser focused on ensuring all ARPA and other surge funds are obligated while working to manage the rolling cessation of short-term funding coupled with a long-term trend in year-over-year resource reductions as needs in the community continue to grow. In some instances, the compliance requirements associated with the short-term funding 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 recover from after-effects of 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 has been exacerbated by it.

At the federal level, at the time of this writing, the federal government has passed a 90 day Continuing Resolution (CR) to appropriate funds for the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) which will began on October 1, 2025. If both Houses of Congress are unable to pass a second appropriations bill by year end, some of our services will transition, essentially, to the equivalent of a month-to-month lease or need to be suspended. 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 in 2025 without either an extension of the 90 day CR or passage of 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 to the extent possible. However, 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 given current revenue forecasts. It is also unclear if the funds made available for services will cover the cost of delivery and administration.

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

The ability of the Human Services Department to implement capital projects and services in the behavioral health and housing arenas has been substantially advanced by Council's passage of the sale taxes authorized under HBs 1406 and 1590 which will fund the Housing and Behavioral Health Facilities Capital Fund should Council appropriate those resources in the 2025 and 2026 budget. In that instance, we anticipate being able to issue a Notice of Funding Opportunity to continue implementing the Council-approved plan in 2025.

## PROGRAMS

### ***1. With ARPA funding ending, what programs/services will be impacted and how? What is your plan for mitigating the impacts?***

The majority of programs currently being operated with ARPA and other forms of surge funding began being phased out in 2023 and will continue being phased out in 2025-2026. 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 have been 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. These impacts cannot be fully mitigated with our existing and anticipated resources and we are working closely with the Executive Office to develop Congressional and Legislative priorities and agenda items for consideration by Council. The items under priority consideration align with those of our delegations and the various industry associations with which we work. All are based in research regarding best and most promising practices from around the nation and world.

**2. What new programs are you proposing for 2025-2026? What need or efficiency is that 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. It should be noted that there was tremendous and pent-up demand for capital funding for affordable/supportive housing and behavioral health facilities in our first round of Notices of Funding Opportunity. For our Housing capital funding, we received \$38,399,408 in proposals for the \$13 million available. For our Behavioral Health Facilities capital funding, we received \$9,434,738 in proposals for \$3,000,000 in funding.

Both the 1406 and 1590 funds provide for long term sustainability with extended or no sunset dates. However, there are significant caveats. First, sales tax revenues are lower than previously forecasted and secondly, the cost of operating and maintaining facilities has increased dramatically. Both of these economic factors have a significant impact on the funding we can make available in any given year and still maintain a healthy fund balance through the biennium. Should one or both of these conditions remain unchanged and no additional resources become available, the extended outlook is challenging. The Executive's 2025-2026 proposed spending plan takes these factors into consideration with a conservative approach designed to preserve a stronger fund balance at the end of 2026 than originally planned and the ability to course correct in outlying years if needed.

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 Housing and Behavioral Health Capital Fund Investment Plan which is reviewed as part of the budget development cycle.

**3. Are there departmental change requests not included in the Executive's Recommended Budget that you feel Council should consider including? If so, please provide the change request number and justification for inclusion of the request.**

Does not apply.

INTERNAL OPERATIONS

**1. Please explain how you intended to meet the Executive's 3% Resource Alignment request.**

The Human Services Department plans to leave one existing Office Assistant II position unfilled and we have increased our administration reimbursable charges to Fund 124 programs to meet the target. Our analysis indicates that these two actions can be implemented without a negative impact on service delivery or current staff.

**2. How are increasing Internal Service Rates impacting your department/programs?**

The increase in rates does create an impact across the department but the vast majority of programs we operate are currently able to absorb the increases to address our tremendous, enterprise-wide need. We anticipate that, ultimately, implementation of an enterprise resource program will create efficiencies over time, particularly to our financial processes and, potentially, grants management processes as well. I will note that this is not the case for all programs operated by all departments but the impact on the Human Services Department, as a largely grant-funded department, is being mitigated

in the short-term by the ongoing availability of several sources of surge funding and the passage of the sales tax supporting affordable housing and behavioral health capital projects.

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

Does not apply.