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## **Health Equity Zones Initiative community nominations now open**

*Initiative will fund health-related projects in three Washington communities*

**OLYMPIA** – Where you live can directly impact your health. Some Washington communities have lower life expectancies, struggle with air pollution and other environmental concerns, or have fewer doctors or medical facilities. To help people facing health barriers, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) is proud to announce nominations are now open for the state’s new [Health Equity Zones \(HEZ\) initiative](#). HEZ gives people an opportunity to share their ideas and create a model for collaborative solutions.

“This is an exciting new opportunity to create health programs led by community from the very beginning,” said Lacy Fehrenbach, Chief of Prevention, Safety, and Health. “People who live in under-resourced communities know best what is needed to improve health in their area. Health Equity Zones are a way to tap into that local knowledge and design lasting solutions.”

The HEZ initiative, created by the Washington legislature in 2021, will pilot community-led projects in three different “zones” – rural, urban, and Native communities – aiming to address each area’s most pressing health issues.

People statewide are [invited to nominate their community as a HEZ](#). The nomination period is open from March 13-April 23. Each geographic area chosen as a HEZ will receive \$200,000 per year for two years to identify health priorities and develop community action plans. DOH plans to extend funding opportunities beyond the initial two years.

“From my lived experience growing up in an Asian immigrant household and as a primary care physician in resource-limited neighborhoods, I am eager to ensure that local communities are supported to address their root causes of health inequities,” said Paul Park, HEZ Community Advisory Council member and Senior Director of Programs for Solid Ground, an organization working to end poverty in King County. “In my work, I continue to witness firsthand how

innovative approaches can empower communities to tackle some of the most complicated health-related social barriers, including housing and food insecurity.”

“To reduce health disparities, we have to bring a bottom-up focus on communities through collaboration, outreach and education,” said Sen. Karen Keiser, prime sponsor of [Senate Bill 5052](#), which established the HEZ initiative. “That’s what makes Health Equity Zones such an important step forward for community health in our state. I am excited by their potential to build healthier, stronger communities.”

The HEZ Community Advisory Council is a group of tribal, community, and sector leaders from across the state. The council designed the nomination process and will choose the rural and urban zones. Tribal community representatives will identify the zone for Native communities. DOH is providing technical assistance for the initiative.

To learn more about HEZ and how to nominate a community, visit the [Health Equity Zones Initiative website](#).

The [DOH website](#) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#). Sign up for the DOH blog, [Public Health Connection](#).

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