



April 10, 2017

People in Whatcom County are worried about their health.

The national turmoil over health care has WAHA's phone ringing off the hook. Our waiting room is filled with anxious people wondering:

"How will I survive without my Medicare?"

"My child has a serious illness. What if Medicaid goes away?"

"I have a pre-existing condition. What happens if my insurance plan is cancelled?"

WAHA was here for you before the Affordable Care Act. We are here for you now.

In 2002, WAHA was formed in response to a broken health care system. For nearly 15 years, WAHA has been working to improve health care access and the experience of care in our region. Today, WAHA remains your steadfast champion for health care transformation.

WAHA is here to answer your most urgent questions about health insurance and health care. We offer free, unbiased information, referrals and advocacy for all Whatcom residents. A call to WAHA can mean the difference between severe health hardships or peace of mind for many Whatcom households -- especially the most vulnerable among us. Our dedicated, compassionate healthcare navigators bring over a decade of experience: guiding people through Medicare, Medicaid and subsidized insurance and connecting them to primary care doctors, specialty and charity care. WAHA is your health care advocate; nimble and responsive in the face of constant change.

[But we need YOUR help in these turbulent times.](#)

Navigating the Shifting Winds of Healthcare

Navigating the maze of health care and coverage options can be daunting. Choosing one route may have serious impacts; even closing the door to other coverage and social services. We at WAHA understand the importance of having a good navigator when making critical health care decisions.

"You never think it's going to happen to you. You don't wake up and drink your cup of coffee, thinking, 'I am going to get cancer today'."

WAHA's Connector Services staff and volunteers offer guidance in person or by phone about a wide range of health care and insurance questions.

Throughout just the past three years, WAHA helped enroll over 80,000 people in health insurance within our five-county region. Between 2015 and 2016, WAHA staff and community partners enrolled over 14,000 people. As the Lead Navigator for Washington's Health Benefits Exchange, WAHA helped reduce the rate of uninsured in Whatcom County to under 5%.

In 2016 alone, our Statewide Health Insurance Benefits Advisors (SHIBA) advocates submitted more than 1,000 Medicare Savings Program applications – saving clients an average of \$1,258 per year in Medicare Part B premiums. We helped 3,767 Medicare beneficiaries to understand and access their Medicare plans. And with WAHA's assistance, 1,190 consumers saved \$4,000 per year on average through the "Federal Extra Help" program. Additionally, 498 Whatcom residents received critical charity medical care, thanks to WAHA's healthcare navigators.

A Splinter Turns Septic

A family of four with a high-deductible insurance plan came to WAHA in desperation. Their four-year-old child had a large splinter in his knee and received treatment at their primary care clinic. Unfortunately, the child developed an infection that ultimately required surgery. After surgery, the infection became systemic, requiring an emergency room visit and yet more surgery. Things got worse when the father lost his job; the family was unable to pay for the expensive medical bills. WAHA advocated for the family to receive charity assistance to help cover the bills. Just as importantly, WAHA helped the family enroll in a new lower-cost, comprehensive insurance plan that covered the children for follow-up care.

are frequent users of our emergency medical system. Our skilled Intensive Case Managers have improved care for people with complex medical, housing and psychosocial needs, saving hundreds of thousands of dollars for our community response systems; reducing unnecessary 911 calls and admissions by over 45%.

Advance Care Planning: In 2016, our Advance Care Planning program educated 1,050 people about end of life issues and helped over 3,000 people craft their Advance Care Directives; documents to guide important decision-making for people facing serious illnesses and end-of-life issues.

The North Sound Accountable Community of Health (ACH): WAHA launched the North Sound ACH to promote healthcare systems transformation through collaboration, integrating best practices from community health partners and stakeholders across the region. The North Sound ACH works collectively to reduce costs, improve health outcomes, and enhance the experience of care throughout Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, San Juan and Island Counties.

You Need a Good Pilot

WAHA has piloted several projects to improve complex healthcare and systems problems. Whether grappling with the effects of income instability, language barriers, age, or disability, our pilots test new concepts to reduce disparities in healthcare access and improve health and wellness. Your support has allowed us to test innovative programs, including:

Intensive Case Management: Since 2014, WAHA's Intensive Case Managers have worked with the Community Paramedic, the Emergency Department, the Homeless Outreach Team and other community partners to help people who

WAHA has been testing and implementing innovative health care pilots for over a decade, improving the healthcare system for everyone, especially the most vulnerable members of our community.

The Road Ahead

In 2017, WAHA will continue to help people access affordable coverage and health care. But more must be done to help under-served and vulnerable members of our community. We know that rural and Latino residents of Whatcom County have unequal access to healthcare and coverage. This year, WAHA is piloting a “Community Health

Worker” program to reach under-served households in the communities where they live. By expanding our outreach to rural and Latino households, we can do more to break down barriers due to language, transportation, and cultural impediments to health equality.

“What would I have done without WAHA? Well, my folks offered to pay my medical bills out of their retirement savings. All in all, the cost was close to \$100,000 for the tests, the surgery, the recovery and the medication. I couldn’t have waited until I could afford it. I had the kind of disease that needed to be treated right away – or it was not treatable.”

Your Voice Matters

WAHA was launched to implement a bold vision of vibrant health for residents of Whatcom County; addressing unequal access and a broken healthcare system in our own community. Our work is a powerful example of how joining forces locally can improve health and health care

WAHA is YOUR community voice for health care access and equality.

access for all. WAHA has been your advocate and navigator through complex changes in the healthcare system. In addition to providing direct services for all, regardless of income or background, we represent your community voice to

the decision-makers in health policy and reform locally, regionally, and state-wide. We are a voice to be reckoned with, bringing the combined experience and expertise of our many community partners, board members and our staff. Together we will ensure that your voice is heard.

It’s time to act!

In the midst of the current debate over healthcare in America, WAHA is sponsoring a local community forum. A panel of area health care professionals and community leaders will share their perspectives on the future of affordable care; audience discussion and Q & A will follow. WAHA staff will be available on-site to answer your questions. The forum is free and open to the public. More information is on our website. Mark your calendar!

**The Future of Affordable Care:
Threats and Opportunities**
Thursday, April 20, 7:00 – 9:00 PM
St. Luke’s Health Education Center
3333 Squalicum Parkway, Bellingham

WAHA is **your** resource for healthcare information and advocacy. With health care under attack, your donation is vital to maintaining WAHA’s Health Connector Services – the friendly, knowledgeable and experienced people who help you get and keep your health insurance and

care in Whatcom County. Our community is only as healthy as our commitment to care for our most vulnerable. During a time of unprecedented cuts in funding for health and human services, WAHA needs your help to continue offering advocacy and guidance on Medicare, Apple Health, subsidized health plans, resources for cancer care, behavioral health and much more. Whether you give a one-time donation, a planned gift, or a monthly pledge, your support has a big impact.

Please give today, for the health of your community. [Click here to donate.](#)

We are the Whatcom *Alliance* for Health Advancement. In alliance with you, our supporters, we can achieve health equity in our community.

Sincerely,



Carol Gipson
Executive Director



Heather Flaherty
President of the Board

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