



WPHP Marks 40 Years of Championing Physician Health

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For four decades, Washington Physicians Health Program (WPHP) has stood at the forefront of a simple but highly effective model that confidential help, not discipline, best supports a healthy and safe healthcare workforce. Founded on the belief that early intervention and compassion lead to better outcomes, WPHP has helped thousands of physicians and health professionals return to safe practice. As medical organizations face rising burnout, workforce shortages, and increasing complexity of care, WPHP's mission has never been more vital.

Physicians dedicate their careers to diagnosing and treating illness while navigating long hours, critical decisions, and the emotional weight of caring for others. When they experience physical health conditions, mental health challenges, or substance use disorders, the stakes are amplified — for their own well-being and for the patients who they serve. Yet many physicians and other health professionals delay or avoid seeking care due to legitimate concerns that disclosure could jeopardize their licenses or livelihoods. The cost of this silence is significant: untreated health conditions contribute to mental health crises, medical errors, workforce attrition, and burnout. In fact, national data indicates burnout rate among physicians is at 45%, with physicians being at higher risk for burnout relative to other US workers¹.

WPHP exists to provide a confidential pathway to address these concerns while safeguarding patient safety and preserving careers. WPHP is Washington's trusted resource for restoring the health of medical professionals. Our confidential support and exceptional outcomes provide reassurance of safe practice and promote workforce sustainability.

Reducing Physician Risk and Enhancing Patient Care

Early intervention is central to WPHP's impact. By identifying and addressing health concerns before they compromise clinical performance, WPHP supports physicians and health professionals in returning to safe

practice. A study on physician health programs has shown that participants often exhibit lower rates of professional liability risk than non-participants and that patient care may be improved by PHP monitoring².

This data underscores not just the immediate benefits of WPHP participation, but its lasting value in helping health professionals recover health, sustain careers, and stay connected to the patients and communities they serve.

The value of a robust, advocacy-centered health program for health professionals cannot be overstated. Outcomes show that when physicians receive the right support at the right time, they can recover, thrive, and continue to provide the high-quality care that communities depend on. Throughout our four decades of service, WPHP has supported health professionals in Washington state with health support and ongoing advocacy that has helped them heal and continue practicing safely.

Physician Advocacy in Action

WPHP advocates at local and national levels for reforms that reduce barriers to accessing help while elevating the importance of improving professional satisfaction. These contributions further embed WPHP as a trusted partner in Washington's medical ecosystem. A prime example of this advocacy in action was our participation in the 2026 Washington State Medical Association Annual Legislative Summit at the Washington State Capitol in Olympia, where WPHP helped shape discussions about physician well-being and policy priorities at the state level.

WPHP also provided key testimony before the Washington Senate Health and Long-Term Care Committee in support of two pieces of legislation that will benefit license holders regulated by the Washington Medical Commission. The first bill was a technical remedy that will allow Anesthesiology Assistants to participate in WPHP through the implementation of a license surcharge that mirrors what other eligible professionals contribute.

The second bill provides license holders with a non-disciplinary pathway to relinquish their license. Relinquishment allows individuals who may be permanently unable to practice due to impairment or disability a dignified departure from practice that honors and respects their contribution to humanity.

One of WPHP's most significant recent achievements has been around credentialing reform. After several years of advocacy efforts, WPHP has helped successfully lead the Washington Credentialing Standardization Group (WCSG) in aligning the Washington Practitioner Application (WPA) with credentialing best practices as referenced in the American Medical Association article, "[Teamwork Gives Washington State New Approach to Credentialing](#)," by Tanya Albert Henry³. The WPA is the most commonly used credentialing application by health care systems in Washington. In 2023, the WPA was revised to ask only about current impairment rather than past diagnosis or treatment. The changes made earlier this year implemented updated model language to reduce the stigma surrounding healthcare professionals seeking mental and behavioral health care. By eliminating intrusive questions and fine-tuning question wording, a major barrier to physician well-being has been removed.

WPHP extends gratitude to Makrina Shanbour, MD, Director of Provider Experience at Confluence Health, and her team for their partnership, as well as to Carrienne Dockter, Chair of the WCSG, for her steadfast leadership throughout the reform process.

Expanding Education and Awareness

To further elevate awareness of WPHP's program and services and how we help support the healthcare community across Washington state, we recently produced a one-hour educational presentation entitled "[WPHP Overview & Impairment](#)." We encourage all health professionals to watch it to learn how:

- Impairment is defined and how it applies to health professionals including the ethical and legal obligations for responding to concerns of impairment.
- Signs of impairment in health professionals and barriers to effectively addressing concerns of impairment.
- The process by which WPHP assists health professionals with concerns of impairment and the basis for effective advocacy that balances public trust and the need to protect patient safety with the rehabilitative needs of health professionals.
- Outcomes that demonstrate WPHP's effectiveness and benefits of program participation.

As healthcare challenges evolve, WPHP's leadership in physician health, advocacy, and policy reform, ensures that Washington's health professionals, along with the patients they serve, are supported for decades to come. If you or a colleague need help, please do not hesitate to contact WPHP at wphp.org or 800-552-7236.

References

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2. Brooks E, Gendel MH, Gundersen DC, et al. Physician health programmes and malpractice claims: reducing risk through monitoring. Occup Med (Lond). Jun 2013;63(4):274-80. doi:[10.1093/occmed/kqt036](https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqt036)
3. Henry, Tanya Albert. "Teamwork Gives Washington State New Approach to Credentialing." American Medical Association, 26 Jan. 2026, <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/physician-health/teamwork-gives-washington-state-new-approach-credentialing>.