



SUPPORTING POLICY SOLUTIONS TO LOWER HEALTH CARE COSTS

The rising cost of health care is unsustainable. Patients in Washington are forced to choose between going to the doctor and paying for basic needs like food and rent. Businesses struggle to pay escalating health care costs. And 20% of our state budget is spent on health care.

[New reports](#) from the Attorney General and Insurance Commissioner find that “rising health care costs have created a growing and persistent health care affordability challenge for individuals, families, employers, and taxpayers in Washington.” The reports confirm the [harms of health care prices](#): crushing medical bills, double-digit premium increase, and Washington families and businesses that are out of options. No single answer can solve this complex issue. But we can target key aspects of the problem through sound, data-driven policy options.

These 4 legislative solutions can help make that possible:

1 Increasing Insight Into Health Care Cost Drivers

[SB 5519/HB 1508](#)

Created in 2020, Washington’s [Health Care Cost Transparency Board \(HCCTB\)](#) is working to understand what’s driving health spending, but the HCCTB has faced industry pushback, limited resources, and data challenges that are preventing full transparency. We need new transparency tools to strengthen the Board and help us understand what’s driving health care spending by:

- Studying underinsurance and its impact on consumers and employers
- Adding consumer, worker, and employer representatives to the advisory committee
- Allowing it to share data with other agencies and examine revenue streams
- Providing transparency when big health systems and insurers’ spending growth exceeds the state’s goals through public hearings

[82%](#) of Washingtonians support more state oversight of health care spending growth

2 Improving Health Care Accountability Through Fair Negotiations

[SB 5948/HB 2066](#)

The [AGO/OIC reports](#) confirm concerns that Washington’s large, consolidated health care systems have too much power in negotiating with insurers and can drive prices up. Legislators can curb this anti-competitive behavior and restore healthier marketplace negotiations by:

- Preventing several common anti-competitive practices in contract negotiations between insurers and providers
- Allowing the AGO to enforce violations under the Consumer Protection Act

[87%](#) of Washingtonians support guardrails on contracts between insurers and providers to manage prices

3 Preventing Anticompetitive Mergers (Keep Our Care Act)

[SB 5241/HB 1263](#)

The [AGO/OIC studies](#) highlight how health system mergers and acquisitions often result in higher prices for patients and can diminish access to important health care services in our communities. Legislators can implement stronger oversight by expanding an existing pre-merger notification process by:

- Preventing consolidations that reduce access to affordable quality care or drive up prices
- Requiring the health care needs of marginalized communities to be considered

[87%](#) of Washingtonians support more competition to improve choice and access

4 Ending Surprise Bills from Ground Ambulances

[SB 5986](#)

Ground ambulances are the only health care providers that are still allowed to send surprise bills to patients. A recent OIC workgroup [report](#) found that even if Washington consumers have insurance, they face surprise “balance bills” that average over \$500 for emergency services and \$1,000 for non-emergency services. Legislators can close this loophole by:

- Ensuring that patients are only responsible for insurance cost-sharing (like co-pays and deductibles) for all covered ground ambulance services, just like other health care services
- Preventing billing abuses by establishing a set ground ambulance reimbursement rate through local jurisdictions (a common tool used today) or a default rate

[90%](#) of Washingtonians say the government should ensure patients can’t be charged out-of-network prices if they encounter an out-of-network provider through no fault of their own



With Fair Health Prices Washington, patient and consumer groups, business leaders, and labor organizations are working together to make our health care system work for everyone.

Visit fairhealthprices.org for more information.