



Home Health Shortage Area Designation (HB 2621 / SB 6359)

Background

Rural and remote areas of Washington State lack adequate access to home health services. Federal law allows rural health clinics (RHCs) to request designation of a home health shortage area by the Department of Health (DOH) with approval from CMS. This designation allows RHCs to offer a limited scope of services, including home nursing visits to homebound patients. Unfortunately, state law creates barriers to utilizing this federal opportunity; RHCs would need to be licensed as a home health agency and secure a Certificate of Need in order to provide this service.

WSHA Position

WSHA strongly supports House Bill 2621/Senate Bill 6359 to provide a narrow exemption for RHCs in DOH designated shortage areas from both the licensing and Certificate of Need requirements. The bill will allow increased access to critical home health services in underserved communities.

Key Messages

- Home health services are critical in keeping patients out of higher cost facilities, such as skilled nursing facilities or acute care.
- Under the current system, home health agencies serve large geographic areas and routinely face challenges such as staffing shortages and long travel times that go unreimbursed. Allowing local RHCs to provide limited in-home services will help rural patients access these services.
- The DOH, WSHA, the Home Care Association of Washington and key rural hospital leaders have worked over the past 18 months to establish a process that works for regulators, home health agencies, hospitals and patients. This process requires DOH oversight, coordination between the hospital and local home health agency, approval by CMS, and will be reevaluated every two years.

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