



The King County Veterans, Seniors, and Human Services Levy

Human Service, Labor & Economic Development Committee Briefing

Presenters:

Michael Bailey, Division Director, DCHS' Adult Services Division

Last updated: 2.18.2026

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About DCHS

DCHS reaches nearly **440,000** community members annually through the services it provides.

The services and programs DCHS invest in consist of behavioral health treatment, affordable housing and related services, childcare resources, services for kids and families, education and employment for youth and young adults, veteran services, senior supports, and inclusive resources for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These direct investments are part of King County’s efforts to create a welcoming community where every person can thrive.

DCHS currently employs **620 staff**, with total approved **Full-Time Employees (FTEs) of 655**.

MISSION

Provide equitable opportunities for people to be healthy, happy, and connected to community.

VISION

The Department of Community and Human Services supports and maintains vital communities, families and individuals. The field of human services exists to undo and mitigate unjust structures that historically, and currently, allocate benefit and burden in ways that favor some and disfavor others.

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Focusing on Our Three Priority Populations

The VSHSL serves three key groups:



Veterans, servicemembers, and their families

7,692 Veterans, Military Servicemembers, and Their Respective Family Members served in 2024



Seniors and caregivers:

43,800 Seniors and Their Caregivers served in 2024



Resilient communities:

7,373 Members of Resilient Communities served in 2024



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Five Result Areas

& 55 Strategies and Sub-Strategies



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What is the **Problem** That We’re Trying to Solve?

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Understanding the Current Problem



Problem

Difficulty in retaining staff, recruiting staff, and appropriately compensating staff remains an issues within our region’s human services sector.



18% turnover for full-time staff



20% turnover for part-time staff



29% believe they are under paid

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Understanding the Current Problem

2025 King County Nonprofit Wage & Benefits Survey Report asked which of the following programs and policies they use to help with employee retention and increase employee engagement.



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What is our **Strategy** To Solve That Problem?

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Understanding the Our Strategy for Change



Strategy FS 6, **our Workforce Stabilization strategy**, aims to improve staff recruitment and retention within nonprofit organizations providing human services in King County, such as food security nonprofit providers serving unincorporated King County.

Funds may be used to support staff across an organization through related expenses including, but not limited to:

- increased wages
- improved benefits
- reduced cost of living such as housing, education, childcare subsidies or health insurance coverage
- professional development and other training to improve service quality and staff wellness

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Implementing Our Strategy for Change



Program Design

In 2025, the Policy and Community Engagement Team held provider listening sessions to identify workforce recruitment and retention needs and barriers.

The team also reviewed strategies used in comparable settings, coordinated with other DCHS workforce initiatives, and analyzed findings from the 2025 King County Nonprofit Wage & Benefits Survey.



Eligible Expenses

Through a series of competitive RFX events we invited organizations to submit applications to receive funding to support the following workforce stabilization strategies identified in our listening session and through our research:

- Increased Wages
- Improved Benefits
- Reduced Cost of Living
- Professional Development and Training
- Bonuses

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As part of a secondary literature review, we identified what improvement similar organizations were able to achieve when funding initiatives similar to what we have listed. Those include:

Eligible Expense	Applicable Research – What Studies Documented
Increased Wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$1/hour wage increase reduced turnover by 3.61% Organizations that implemented permanent hourly wage increases had turnover rates 14.6 percentage points lower 43% of grantees experienced decrease vacancy rates and 52% experienced improved retention rates
Improved Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workers enrolled in health benefits were more likely to remain employed past 11 months not enrolled
Professional Development and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to professional development and trainings more than twice a year correlated to longer retention.
Bonuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers retained 82% of staff after distributing retention bonuses averaging \$3,429 Organizations providing retention bonuses had turnover rates 10 percentage points lower than those that did not.

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Implementing Our Strategy for Change

VSHSL FS 6 Funded Supports, Rounds 1 & 2* supported the following efforts:



Increased Wages
 • 53 organizations



Benefit Enhancements
 • 38 organizations



Professional Development & Training
 • 61 organizations



Hiring & Retention Bonuses
 • 85 organizations



Cost of Living Subsidies
 • 19 organizations



Other
 • 15 organizations

*By March 2026 we will have Round 3 data

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Implementing Our Strategy for Change

Staff Recruitment

➤ Metric: Vacancy Rates

- The majority of respondents (29%) reported no impact to vacancy rates, indicating that staffing levels have largely remained stable, neither improving nor worsening.
- A notable share of respondents (17%) reported moderate impacts, suggesting early or emerging improvements in recruitment for some organizations.
- Vacancy trend data reinforces this finding, with 68% of respondents indicating vacancy rates are the same as prior to receiving FS-6 funds, while 28% reported decreases in vacancy rates.

Staff Retention

➤ Metric: Turnover Rates

- The largest share of respondents (29%) reported **some impact** on reducing turnover, indicating early stabilization effects across organizations.
- Nearly one-quarter (23%) reported a **moderate impact**, and 20% reported a **high impact**, suggesting meaningful turnover reductions for a substantial subset of providers.
- Turnover trend data reinforces these findings, with 58% of respondents indicating turnover rates are the **same** as prior to receiving FS-6 funds, while 40% reported **decreases in turnover**.

Implementing Our Strategy for Change

Feedback from current awardees on how King County can structure future funding investments to better support workforce stabilization efforts. (**Note:** Awardees asked to select all that apply.)

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Theme	Description (What respondents emphasized)	% of Responses
Multi-year / Predictable Funding	Need for multi-year, sustained, predictable investments; concern about one-time or short-term funding	64.6%
Administrative Burden & Reporting Requirements	Reporting is overly burdensome, time-consuming, misaligned, or harmful for small orgs	40.0%
Flexibility in Use of Funds	Value of flexible spending (bonuses, stipends, wages, wellness, benefits, PD, tech)	47.7%
Cost of Living & True Cost of Services	Funding should reflect King County labor costs, COLA, Medicaid reimbursement gaps	32.3%
Positive Impact on Morale & Retention	Improved morale, feeling valued, retention, reduced burnout, workplace culture	41.5%
Short-Term Bonuses Preferred (Risk Management)	Bonuses/stipends preferred over permanent wage increases when funding is temporary	21.5%
Timing, Contracting & Payment Delays	Late contract execution, delayed payments, short commitment windows limiting impact	16.9%
Equity & Culturally Specific Workforce Needs	Importance of culturally/linguistically specific staff and equity-centered investments	20.0%
Need for Administrative / Capacity Funding	Desire to fund admin time, finance, HR, systems to support workforce investments	18.5%
Gratitude / No Additional Feedback	Expressions of appreciation or “no feedback / N/A”	29.2%

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Implementing Our Strategy for Change

Currently unallowable FS 6 Workforce Stabilization Funding uses/expenses that if approved would further support workforce stabilization. **(Note: Awardees asked to select all that apply.)**

Expense Category	% of Respondents
New staff salaries	61.5%
Operational capacity building	56.9%
Replacement of salary funding for current staff	52.3%
Program expansion	33.8%
Volunteer / student / intern / participant or other non-staff supports	26.2%
Student loan payments or payments toward personal debt	23.1%
Devices	16.9%
Workforce supports for staff working outside of King County	13.8%
Other	12.3%
Capital purchases	10.8%

Other

- On-call and temporary worker coverage for direct service staff to attend professional development
- Tuition reimbursements to further education; CEU's reimbursements for licensed staff (e.g., ARNP, MDs, etc.)
- Devices to help replace old laptops, desks
- Salary funding of our staff to sustain new benefits.
- Student loan payments
- Capacity building / right-sizing
- Supplements to current funding to expand usage beyond the scope of the original application.
- Robust HR software.
- Cover the cost of accommodations for staff that needs to communicate with people outside the agency.
- Acquire cell phones for staff to reduce use of personal cell phones for business.

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Partnering Throughout DCHS



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Coordinating Our Strategy for Change



Another workforce supports program is complementing the FS 6 efforts.

The Behavioral Health and Recovery Division's Crisis Care Center Levy (CCC L) Strategy 3 is funding career pathway activities to support the development of the behavioral health workforce through:

- Stipends for paid internships;
- Clinical supervision costs;
- Professional licensure fees;
- Resources for community behavioral health agencies to promote the wellbeing of workers, and
- Clinical training, including evidence-based practice training.

The workforce supports outlined in the CCC L and VSHSL Implementation Plans are complementary and address different needs as expressed by the workforce and seen in the data. The Adult Services Division and the Behavioral Health Recovery Division are working in partnership to ensure funding opportunities are accessible to providers and not duplicative.

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