

Washington Community Leaders Join Forces to Seed Endowment for First-Generation, Underserved Students to Pursue Health Care Careers

Sea Mar Community Health Centers and Community Health Plan of Washington partnership will create a more equitable healthcare provider pipeline at the University of Washington

SEATTLE – June 1, 2021 – [Sea Mar Community Health Centers](#) and [Community Health Plan of Washington \(CHPW\)](#), have partnered to seed an endowment at the [University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity](#) and [UW Bothell](#) for first-generation, low income and underserved students who are studying health care. With a focus on diversity and inclusion, these community leaders aim to ensure there is a more equitable representation in the health care provider community going forward.

Sea Mar and CHPW have gifted \$25,000 each to the University of Washington to seed a new endowment. The organizations will work with others in the community to raise the additional funding needed to establish a \$100,000 endowment that will provide scholarship funds for students in support of their education in any health-related field. Additional donations can be made through [this link](#).

“Sea Mar appreciates the excellent work Rickey Hall, Vice President of University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity, is doing to increase representation of underserved communities in healthcare professions. By seeding this endowment to increase diversity in the health care provider workforce, we can move this work further forward and take meaningful steps to address disparities in health outcomes and care,” said Rogelio Riojas, president and CEO of Sea Mar. “The health care system should be as diverse as the people it serves, but today sadly, it is not. With social and cultural factors playing an important role in health and wellness, it is critical that we champion an equitable approach to education for people of all races and cultures to ensure that health care providers are well-positioned to support each patient’s unique needs.”

“At CHPW, we are committed to improving health care equity for individuals as well as addressing systemic issues that are at the root of health care disparities,” said Leanne Berge, CEO of Community Health Plan of Washington and Community Health Network of Washington. “One of our core beliefs is in the power of community. For us, that means ensuring that our members and their families can draw support from the resources within their communities and the strength of those connections. This initiative provides an opportunity to strengthen that power, both for the individuals who will have greater opportunities to realize their hopes and dreams, and for their communities. We’re pleased to be able to contribute to this important initiative with our partners at Sea Mar and the University of Washington, and look forward to seeing this endowment grow to support the education of first-generation students for years to come.”

“I want to express my deep appreciation to Sea Mar Community Health Centers and Community Health Plan of Washington for their generosity,” UW Bothell Chancellor Wolf Yeigh said. “In helping us establish this new fund, they will have a powerful impact on our students. Almost half of the diverse population of students we serve will be the first in their families to receive a four-year degree and about a third are eligible for federal Pell Grants. This new resource will give more of our students the support they need to stay in school and to make the most of their UW education.”

Health disparities impact segments of the population disproportionately. Having a health care workforce reflective of the community can help dismantle barriers to health care and restore trust with populations that are underserved. Specifically, the primary purpose of this endowed fund is to provide financial assistance to undergraduate students at UW Bothell and students participating in the Educational Opportunity Program at the Seattle campus, which supports American Indian/Alaska Native, underrepresented minority, economically disadvantaged, and first-generation students at the UW.

“Working professionally in the medical field as a community navigator, I often serve other Spanish-speaking immigrants like myself. I frequently provide interpretation or act as a cultural liaison, and patients often have more trust in me than they do an English-only speaking doctor or nurse, and that’s an issue,” said Jesus Soto, a community navigator at Sea Mar. “Upon this realization, I knew that I needed to become a health provider. As a low-income first-generation Latino immigrant, I have had to work harder than my peers to even get the opportunity to compete for a seat in medical school. I have defied the odds, and now that I have been accepted to medical school, I’m honored that the organization that has supported me through this process will be making an even bigger impact on my Latino community and other minority groups. I hope that scholarships like the one Sea Mar, CHPW and the University of Washington are creating will eliminate financial barriers for people of color, so that more people have the opportunity to serve their communities, ultimately improving the lives of those often left behind.”

There is a [lack of diversity among health care providers](#), with 66% of active physicians in Washington state identifying as white, 21% Asian, 2% Black or African American, 3% Hispanic, and only 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Yet, a [diverse health care workforce](#) results in better care for underrepresented populations, higher levels of trust and greater patient satisfaction.

“The reality is that in the United States, college education costs continue to rise. Compounded by the fact that BIPOC students are more likely to graduate with higher levels of debt than white students, this often deters first-generation students of color from continuing graduate education and pursuing health care careers,” said Dr. Alexandra Zaballa, a family physician at Sea Mar and University of Washington alumna. “As a first-generation student of color myself, I know that scholarships helped encourage me to pursue a career in medicine. It was difficult enough to navigate the rigorous course load and exams, limited BIPOC mentorship, and balance the family

responsibilities many BIPOC students have. By providing the financial resources to help pay for a four-year degree, at least one barrier is alleviated.”

“The benefits we gain from more BIPOC health care providers cannot be understated,” Zaballa continued. “In the United States, BIPOC communities have higher rates of chronic disease and markedly worse health outcomes than white communities. Improving health care delivery for these communities is a complicated and multi-layered task that involves increasing the percentage of BIPOC providers. It is well established that BIPOC health care providers are more likely to practice medicine in clinical settings that serve these communities. I am excited this endowment is becoming possible with the contributions of CHPW and Sea Mar and I am proud to work at an organization that is investing in building the diverse workforce that our community needs.”

About Sea Mar

Sea Mar Community Health Centers is a community-based organization committed to providing quality, comprehensive health, human, housing, educational and cultural services to diverse communities, specializing in service to Latinos. Sea Mar provides affordable and quality care for communities at 34 medical clinics, 24 dental clinics, 30 behavioral health clinics and several human and educational services across 13 counties throughout Washington State. Sea Mar continuously strives to engage, strengthen and respond to the needs of its communities. By doing so, Sea Mar has evolved into more than a health center; it has become an essential resource for patients and families.

About CHPW

Founded in 1992 by a network of community and migrant health centers (CHCs) in Washington State, Community Health Plan of Washington is a community-governed, not-for-profit health plan formed to help coordinate care and advocate for people who were not being served by traditional insurance companies. The mission of CHPW is to deliver accessible managed care services that meet the needs and improve the health of Washington communities and to make managed care participation beneficial for community-responsive providers. CHPW serves approximately 250,000 members through Medicaid (an income-based program called Apple Health in WA) and Medicare (age and disability-based program) across the State. CHPW connects members to various physical, behavioral and social support services, and reinvests its profit back into the CHCs to help them deliver better care to all people. CHPW also seeks to identify and address health disparities and inequities, while coordinating services within a broader population health framework. Its parent, Community Health Network of Washington, serves nearly one million individuals across Washington through its CHC network sites. To learn more, visit chpw.org or connect on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), or [LinkedIn](#).

About the University of Washington Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity

Established in 1968 at the UW in Seattle, OMA&D broadens college access and supports the academic success of American Indian/Alaska Native, underrepresented minority, economically



disadvantaged and first-generation students, as well as cultivates a campus climate that enriches the educational experience for all. Find out more at www.washington.edu/omad/, or connect with UW OMA&D on social media at [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), or [Facebook](#).

About the University of Washington Bothell

UW Bothell's commitment to increasing access to a UW education extends well beyond admissions. It also includes offering evening, offsite and certificate programs that help make it possible for more students to pursue higher education. Known for the diversity of its student population — as measured by a variety of factors — UW Bothell has also been recognized for innovations in academic programming and support services designed to help students graduate on time and debt-free. As part of its commitment to excellence, UW Bothell places particular value on diversity and equity, community and campus engagement, and cross-disciplinary teaching and scholarship.

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