



## Agency Recommendation Summary

Credentialing timelines for health care providers have increased and customers are experiencing delays in obtaining their credential to practice, potentially exacerbating an already critical health care workforce shortage. In spring 2023, the Department of Health (department) hired a contractor and engaged the public in listening sessions to better understand the reasons for the delays and to develop recommendations for improvement. To implement these recommendations and realize the improvements in credentialing timeframes, the department requests GF-S funding to support implementation project teams.

## Fiscal Summary

Fiscal Summary <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
<b>Staffing</b>						
FTEs	5.3	16.8	11.05	9.6	9.6	9.6
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001 - 1	\$692	\$2,480	\$3,172	\$1,247	\$1,247	\$2,494
Total Expenditures	\$692	\$2,480	\$3,172	\$1,247	\$1,247	\$2,494

## Decision Package Description

### Problem

Washington is facing severe health care workforce shortages,<sup>[1]</sup> notably in behavioral health and long-term care, that serve as barriers to residents receiving needed health care services. The reasons for these shortages are complex and multifaceted, including the training pipeline, wages and reimbursement rates, and working conditions. The pandemic brought an unprecedented loss of workforce coupled with rapidly rising demand.

The department regulates over 552,000 health professionals across 85 different professions. In 2022, we received over 70,000 applications and issued about 60,000 credentials. Considering the workforce shortage, it is imperative for qualified health care providers to receive a credential quickly so they can begin practicing in Washington. The time between when a provider applies for a health care credential and when they receive one has increased over the past 10 years (see chart below). In 2022, there was an average duration of 86 days between when an application was received and when a credential was issued across all professions (the medical, nursing, and chiropractic professions are excluded since these are regulated by independent authorities).<sup>[2]</sup>

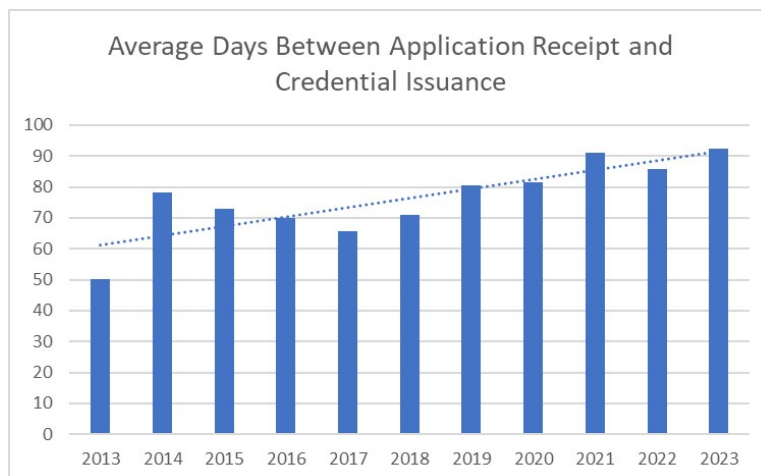


Chart does not include professions regulated by the independent authorities of the Washington Medical Commission, the Board of Nursing, and the Chiropractic Quality Assurance Commission.

The longest delay in the application process is the time between when an applicant submits their initial application to the point it is complete and ready to be processed. Reasons for this vary by profession and include waiting for official transcripts, exam results, validation of supervised hours or internships, and more. When information is missing from an application, we send a letter identifying what we need to continue the process. An application is not considered complete until we receive all the information needed.

In 2022, there was an average duration of 79 days between when an application was received and when it was complete across all professions. Fifty-five percent (39,847 out of 72,954 applications) had missing information that same year. The average time between application submission and completion has risen over the past ten years, as shown in the chart below.

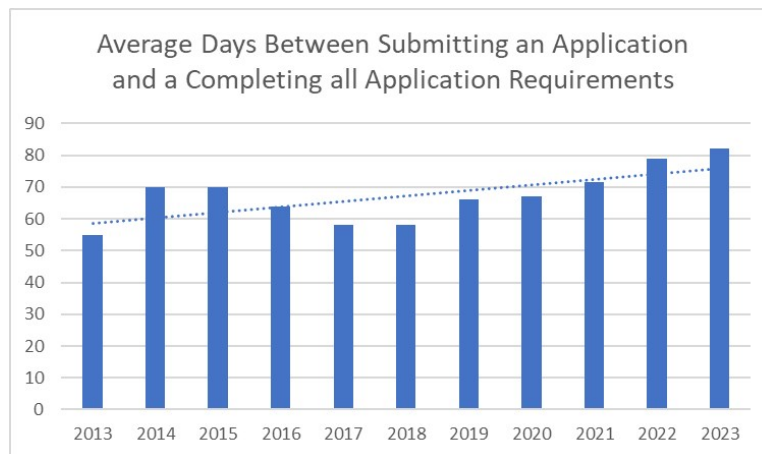


Chart does not include professions regulated by the independent authorities of the Washington Medical Commission, the Board of Nursing, and the Chiropractic Quality Assurance Commission.

To address these delays, the department hired a contractor in spring 2023 to examine the credentialing process and make recommendations for improvement. This work had oversight and support from Governor Inslee’s Results Washington team. The contractor provided process improvement recommendations to the department in August 2023. Results Washington will continue to guide and support the department in further process analysis and identification of improvement opportunities.

2SHB 1724 (2023) required the department to examine licensure requirements for behavioral health professions to identify and address barriers to entering and remaining in the health care workforce and streamline and shorten the credentialing process. In June 2023, the department engaged over 400 health care providers, health care employers, and the public in listening sessions to better understand barriers to timely credentialing. Many of the comments received are applicable beyond behavioral health to all professions the department regulates.

Additionally, the department initiated a focused process improvement project for the psychology profession in spring of 2023 to address critical delays in licensure. The process, organizational, and metric changes deployed for this project resulted in the elimination of all 50 applications pending initial review by the Examining Board of Psychology between March and June 2023.

The department will use all the information collected through these various efforts to identify the changes needed to substantially reduce credentialing timeframes, in order to get qualified providers into the field as quickly as possible. Implementing such deep and widespread change will require a short-term investment of staffing resources.

The department requests \$692K GF-S and 5.3 FTE in FY2024 and \$2.48M GF-S and 16.8 in FY2025 FTE to allow us to:

- **Implement process improvements** identified through the department’s process improvement contractor, Results Washington, and the 2SHB 1724 listening sessions. Implementation will require a project management team, led by a project director and including organizational change management and project management. The credentialing work in the department is complex, spanning multiple business areas and involving over 100 FTE. The scale of change we are seeking to make will require initiation and oversight of multiple,

concurrent improvement projects. Organizational change management expertise will be required to lead teams through the process of letting go of old ways of doing business and embracing new ones. The team will also require intensive data and analytics support to define and refine performance metrics and create data dashboards. Finally, the implementation team will establish processes for the department to closely monitor the status of credentialing in the future and be prepared to react quickly to address delays.

We are working to establish the process improvement implementation team in fall 2023 and anticipate their work will continue through the 2025-27 biennium.

- **Improve information for applicants** to reduce the time between initial application and when it is complete. In 2022, 92% of the time between receipt of an application and issuing a credential is waiting to receive all the information from the applicant that is required for the department to make a credentialing decision. The more we can do to help applicants understand everything that is required of them prior to application submittal—and the more we provide ready access to live assistance during the process—the greater the reduction in credentialing timeframes we will be able to achieve. We propose to reduce this window by:
  - a. Creating web-based training tutorials on how to complete applications,
  - b. Improving the clarity of web content on application instructions,
  - c. Researching and preparing to implement live chat technology that will enable applicants to get real time assistance with application questions.

Funding is required for staffing to review and edit hundreds of pages of web content; write scripts, design, and produce web training tutorials; and conduct business analysis and contract for professional services to complete a feasibility study on live chat technology. This is a one-time ask for SFY 2025.

Once we have completed process improvements, we will need to modify the Health Care Enforcement and Licensing Management System (HELMS) to support the improvements. We anticipate submitting an additional decision package in 2025 for resources to crosswalk process improvements with current database requirements to determine what modifications we need to make to the database. We also anticipate a possible request for funding implementation of live chat software based on our research and requirements.

In addition, because of the credentialing delays and legislation passed in 2023 (2SHB 1724), the department has begun reviewing current laws and rules to identify and address barriers that can be resolved through policy change. This work will go hand-in-glove with the process improvement work and will be key in reducing timelines and making credentialing requirements equitable. If needed, requests to fund implementation of this work will also likely be made in 2025.

### Alternatives

The primary alternative considered is to implement process improvements within existing agency resources. As demonstrated through the psychology credentialing pilot project, the department has the capability to conduct process improvement work. However, accomplishing the scale of process improvement required across 85 professions and 13 boards and commissions would take many years to accomplish. In the meantime, long delays in credentialing health care providers would contribute to an already severe health care workforce shortage.

This proposal is the best option for rapidly moving the needle on credentialing timeframes. It will yield the fastest benefits for applicants, their employers, and Washingtonians needed health care services.

[1] Professions with highest reduction in licensees from [Health-Workforce-Council-Annual-Report-2022-FINAL-PDF.pdf \(wa.gov\)](#): Mental and Social Health Services -62.6%, Home Health Aide/Home Attendant -56.7%, Social Work -50.0%.

[2] Historically, the department's performance metric for credentialing was based on the time between when an application is complete and when it is issued, with a goal 7 calendar days. However, this performance metric did not reflect the full length of time the applicant was experiencing in the process. To capture a more complete picture of the process, the department's new performance metric is defined as the time between an application is submitted until a credential is issued.

## Assumptions and Calculations

### **Expansion, Reduction, Elimination or Alteration of a current program or service:**

This proposal is not an expansion, reduction, elimination or alteration of current program or service.

### **Detailed Assumptions and Calculations:**

The department will conduct feasibility study activities to inform a decision for use of live chat with external customers to support credentialing process improvement. Expected activities will include requirements analysis and prioritization and general design planning. It is anticipated that professional services to support assessment and future implementation planning will be needed for use and integration into existing technology. These activities will better inform expected costs, benefits, risks and timeline for solution identification and implementation.

- \$100,000 for external assessment, integration and planning support for technology solution
- \$250,000 for contracted Project Management Services.

### **Workforce Assumptions:**

**WMS3** – this position will serve as the project director and will be responsible for hiring and managing staff, setting the direction and providing oversight to a large suite of projects, and serving as liaison to agency leadership and Results Washington.

FTE: 0.7

Salary: \$89,672

Benefits: \$27,217

**WMS2** – this position will serve as the organizational change manager. This position will apply organizational change management tools, develop and implement change strategies associated with process improvements and related changes, and develop and implement communication plans.

FTE: 0.5

Salary: \$59,466

Benefits: \$18,872

**MA5** – these positions will serve as project managers for multiple, concurrent improvement projects. They will create project charters and workplans, provide status updates to the project director, and address or escalate barriers. Using Lean methodologies, they will lead staff teams to develop and test processes and procedures, evaluate and refine processes and procedures as they are implemented, and identify and work on areas for additional improvement when appropriate.

FTE: 1.0

Salary: 95,184

Benefits: \$33,047

**Epi 3** – this position will be responsible for creating and maintaining project analytics; developing performance metrics, scorecards, and dashboards; and providing scientific consultation on performance and evaluation data.

FTE: 0.6

Salary: \$66,010

Benefits: \$21,352

**HSC 4** – this position will serve as the subject matter expert for health profession licensing and will be responsible for working with agency communications staff to provide technical information related to webpage updates, instructions on completing applications, and web training tutorials. This position will also work with the project teams to ensure process improvement strategies align with legal requirements for each regulatory program.

FTE: 0.3

Salary: \$28,736

Benefits: \$10,424

**AA3** – this position will support the project team and will be responsible for providing administrative support such as scheduling meetings, taking meeting notes, coordinating and tracking requests and assignments from senior team members and leadership, proofing documents, and processing HR paperwork.

FTE: 0.5

Salary: \$26,310

Benefits: 12,314

**IT BA: *project position FTE assumption***

This position will be responsible for facilitation of requirements documentation to support feasibility study construction, analysis and approval.

FTE: 1.0

Salary: \$118,149

Benefits: 37,590

**IT Project Manager: *assumed contracted services***

This position will serve as the IT Project Manager responsible for managing completion of the feasibility study on utilizing Live Chat as a customer service tool and will be responsible for, working with a standard IT project team to inform the study, defining objective and scope of project, facilitating the research and analysis of potential solutions, assessment of financial viability, evaluating potential risks, and preparing final study for approval. Responsibilities include strategic alignment, assuring organizational change is planned for, problem solving, communication planning, monitoring project and establishing implementation performance measures, presentations and reporting out to project sponsors.

Contract: \$350,000

**OPAE – Community Relations and Equity –**

0.5 HSC3 – This is an existing position that would start on July 1, 2024.

The work that will be conducted: Language Access and Accessibility Reviews and Materials Development: Content and document development in partnership with communication staff to ensure we are in legal compliance, all content meets Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Service (CLAS) Standards and that content is ready for translation. Interpretation: Providing interpretation service connections and processing for content related to licensure credentialing (A language access budget for translations and interpretations of documents or other accessibility needs is also needed).

Salary: \$40,232

Benefits: \$15,068

**OPAE – Health Promotion and Education**

0.5 – HSC3 – This is an existing employee that will start July 1, 2024

Review current content to determine what information is relevant to each profession and write and edit segmented content based on the professions. Plain talk integration into the development process and final review to ensure that instructions are provided using best practices for persons absorbing the information presented and communication. This work will include working with HSQA to receive feedback from our targeted audiences of professionals that would be using these services.

Salary: \$40,232

Benefits: \$15,068

**OPAE – Communications Office** – These positions aren't existing positions and will need to be hired by July 1, 2024.

0.5 FTE CC4 – This position will review existing web page language and best communication practices for a variety of reading/comprehension levels. Additionally, this position will coordinate receiving and incorporating feedback from HSQA in the updating of this language as well as reviewing and consulting on any community feedback that HSQA has received around the language and accessibility of these pages. This position will additionally craft and get review of scripts for the training videos – beginning of project for 6 months

Salary: \$80,464

Benefits: 30,136

2.0 FTE CC5 – These positions will record, edit, review and incorporate feedback for 50 training videos (appx 1 video of 2 weeks)

Salary: \$186,685

Benefits: \$65,366

0.5 FTE CC4 – This position will make changes to and provide support on web content design for the 85 pages in coordination with the other positions. This position will also store and post the training videos to each page and review for accessibility and security standards.

Salary: \$80,464

Benefits: 30,136

Estimated expenditures include salary, benefit, and related costs to assist with administrative workload activities. These activities include policy and legislative relations; information technology; budget and accounting services; human resources; contracts; procurement; risk management, and facilities management.

## Strategic and Performance Outcomes

### ***Strategic Framework:***

This package relates to the Governor’s Results Washington goal area of **Efficient, Effective, and Accountable Government** by investing in process improvement strategies improve credentialing times and developing a performance measurement and oversight process to drive accountability for sustaining and continuing to improve. The package also supports the Results Washington goal area of **Healthy and Safe Communities** by getting qualified providers into practice more quickly to increase access to care.

The package supports the department’s transformational plan in the area of **Health Systems Workforce and Transformation** by ensuring health care providers can quickly enter the workforce and begin providing care to the residents of Washington. This is particularly critical for our most vulnerable populations and those needing behavioral health treatment.

A015 Patient and Consumer Safety - \$692K GF-S and 5.3 FTE in FY2024 and 2.48M GF-S and 16.8 FTE in FY2025.

**Performance Outcomes:**

The department is committed to developing a robust set of performance measures for the credentialing process as part of this package. Existing metrics do not provide the department sufficient data and visibility on how various parts of complex processes are going. One outcome of this investment will be the development of metrics, dashboards, and processes for measuring and monitoring performance of credentialing.

There is significant complexity and numerous processes involved in credentialing 85 health care professionals, many of which have multiple types of credentials per profession (e.g., temporary practice permits, probationary licenses, associate and trainee licenses, compact privileges, endorsements, etc.). Although there are certain processes (e.g., background checks) that are common across professions, there are many processes that are unique to a given profession's requirements (e.g., determining substantial equivalence, reviewing an applicant's coursework for non-traditional educational pathways, obtaining proof of supervised experience, etc.). This level of complexity and variability, combined with the paucity of existing performance data, means the department cannot at this time determine how much credentialing timeframes will improve through the process improvement work and other investments proposed in this package. We believe timeframes may temporarily lengthen before they begin to decline as we test process changes and retrain staff.

Overall, our goal is to reduce the average days between when an application is submitted and when a credential is issued. An equally important goal is to reduce the average days between when an application is submitted and when the department receives all the information required to process the application, as this is the largest delay in the process. Other outcomes would include:

- Reduced amount of contact an applicant must make with the department, as well as time spent, to complete an application.
- Reduced number of letters and time spent notifying the applicant that we need more information to process the application.
- Reduced number of calls with questions about the application process or requirements.
- Increased number of applications that can be processed upon receiving the initial application without additional follow-up.
- Increased satisfaction with the credentialing process and timeframe among applicant/credentialed health care professionals.

**Equity Impacts****Community outreach and engagement:****Community outreach and engagement**

The department conducted several listening sessions in June 2023 to learn about the barriers applicants have experienced in getting credentialed. Some sessions were offered in the evening, and all were translated into Spanish and ASL. The listening sessions allowed the department to hear from applicants that are disadvantaged through language barriers, racism, poverty, and other structural inequities to better understand their unique experiences.

**Disproportional Impact Considerations:****Disproportional impact considerations**

While benefitting all applicants for health care professional credentials, this proposal may especially benefit applicants from disadvantaged communities through improvements that make information on application requirements and instructions easier to read and understand, and through the addition of more options for getting real-time help with completing an application (e.g., live chat).

**Target Populations or Communities:****Target populations and communities**

The main beneficiaries of this proposal are applicants for health care professional credentials, some of whom have invested years in training for their profession and need to start working quickly to begin paying back student loans. Currently licensed health care providers may benefit through process improvements that also affect the license renewal process. Employers of health care professionals (e.g., hospitals, pharmacies, long term care facilities, behavioral health agencies, and clinics) will benefit by being able to get new hires through the credentialing process faster so they can begin serving patients. Ultimately, all Washingtonians needing health care will benefit from changes that improve access to care by getting more qualified providers into practice.

**Other Collateral Connections****Puget Sound Recovery:**

N/A

**State Workforce Impacts:**

N/A

**Intergovernmental:**

The Governor's Results Washington team has been engaged in the process improvement work currently underway and will continue to provide support and oversight throughout implementation.

State agencies that employ health care providers, including DSHS, DOC, and others, will benefit from changes that improve credentialing timeframes. Like other employers of health care providers, faster credentialing means they will be able to get new, out-of-state hires working more quickly.

In addition, the Health Care Authority's Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery has a strong interest in expanding the behavioral health workforce to meet the rising demand for services, particularly in the community mental health system. Investments that serve to speed up credentialing of this workforce support their goals in this area. DSHS has a similar interest in assuring timely credentialing of long-term care workers.

The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board supports changes that address barriers, including credentialing timeframes, that may contribute to the health care workforce shortage.

**Stakeholder Response:**

All health care providers applying for a license or renewing a license as well as their respective professional associations are impacted and will be supportive of this project.

**State Facilities Impacts:**

N/A

**Changes from Current Law:**

N/A

**Legal or Administrative Mandates:**

N/A

**HEAL Act Agencies Supplemental Questions**

1. Please describe specific likely or probable environmental harms and/or benefits and their associated health impacts to overburdened communities and vulnerable populations.

There will be no environmental impacts.

2. Please describe any potential significant impacts to Indian tribes' rights and interest in their tribal lands.

There will be no impacts to Indian tribes' rights and interests in tribal lands.

3. Describe how your agency engaged with Tribes in developing this proposal, including offers for tribal consultation, and any direction provided



by Tribes through this engagement.

N/A

4. Has an [Environmental Justice Assessment](#) been completed? If so, please submit the assessment as an attachment in ABS.

Not required.

5. Describe how your agency used the Environmental Justice Assessment process to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate environmental harms and equitably distribute environmental benefits? If your agency determined that you were unable to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate environmental harms and equitably distribute environmental benefits, please provide a justification for not doing so.

N/A

**Reference Documents**

- [Credentialling - ITaddendum.docx](#)
- [ITaddendumBudget\\_Credentialing.xlsx](#)

**IT Addendum**

***Does this Decision Package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software, (including cloud-based services), contracts or IT staff?***

Yes

**Objects of Expenditure**

Objects of Expenditure <i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Fiscal Years		Biennial	Fiscal Years		Biennial
	2024	2025	2023-25	2026	2027	2025-27
Obj. A	\$456	\$1,419	<b>\$1,875</b>	\$835	\$835	<b>\$1,670</b>
Obj. B	\$165	\$521	<b>\$686</b>	\$303	\$303	<b>\$606</b>
Obj. C	\$0	\$350	<b>\$350</b>	\$0	\$0	<b>\$0</b>
Obj. E	\$27	\$83	<b>\$110</b>	\$48	\$48	<b>\$96</b>
Obj. J	\$11	\$0	<b>\$11</b>	\$0	\$0	<b>\$0</b>
Obj. T	\$33	\$107	<b>\$140</b>	\$61	\$61	<b>\$122</b>

**Agency Contact Information**

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