

Washington Health Benefit Exchange: Understanding Options for Part-Time K-12 and Higher Ed Employees

**PROPOSED
SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES**

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STATE OF WASHINGTON
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND
REVIEW COMMITTEE

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Why a JLARC Study of Health Care Options for Part-Time K-12 and Higher Ed Employees?

The 2013-15 Operating Budget (3ESSB 5034) directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to study the potential for using the Washington Health Benefit Exchange to provide health insurance for part-time K-12 public school employees and the cost of stand-alone dental plans. The Committee included part-time higher education employees and adopted a two-phase approach to the study.

How are Part-Time K-12 and Higher Ed Employees Currently Covered for Health Insurance?

Part-Time K-12 Employees: The state provides funds to local school districts for K-12 employees' health benefits. Benefits, eligibility, and employee cost-sharing are locally negotiated at each of the 295 school districts. As such, how part-time employees are covered varies across school districts.

Part-Time Higher Ed Employees: The state covers part-time Higher Education employees through the Public Employees Benefit Board if they work at least 80 hours per month for more than six months. The state does not provide coverage for employees who do not meet the minimum number of hours. The state pays the same monthly contribution for part-time employees as full-time employees.

What is the Washington Health Benefit Exchange?

The 2011 Legislature created the Washington Health Benefit Exchange (the Exchange) as part of the implementation of the federal Affordable Care Act. The Exchange is a public-private partnership created to allow people to compare qualified health insurance options and purchase health insurance.

People who purchase insurance on the Exchange may be eligible for federal subsidies, including tax credits and cost-sharing assistance for premiums depending on their incomes.

Study Scope

JLARC staff will conduct this study in two phases:

- Phase One will review what data is available and what analysis staff can complete to understand the coverage and cost of existing benefit packages for part-time employees, as well as the feasibility of having part-time K-12 and higher education employees use the Exchange to purchase insurance. This will include the cost of stand-alone dental plans.
- Depending on the information gathered in Phase 1, Phase 2 of the study would develop detailed cost comparisons between existing plans and the Exchange.

Study Objectives (Phase One)

The study will determine:

1. What data is available about current part-time employees' health care coverage?
2. What data is available about part-time employees and their families to determine coverage options through the Health Benefit Exchange?
3. What data is needed to compare the costs and coverage part-time employees currently receive and what they might receive through the Exchange?
4. If there are data gaps, how can they be addressed?
5. Possible administrative, legal, and policy issues associated with changing benefits to the Washington Health Benefit Exchange.

JLARC staff will develop more specific objectives for Phase Two at the completion of Phase One.

Timeframe for the Study

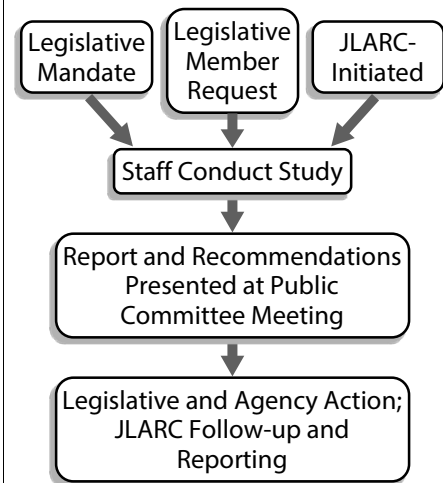
Staff will present the Phase One report at the JLARC meeting in December 2015. In that same timeframe, JLARC staff are also conducting a separately mandated study on school districts' health benefits purchasing and options for a consolidated purchasing system for K-12 employees.

JLARC Staff Contact for the Study

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JLARC Study Process



Criteria for Establishing JLARC Work Program Priorities

- Is study consistent with JLARC mission? Is it mandated?
- Is this an area of significant fiscal or program impact, a major policy issue facing the state, or otherwise of compelling public interest?
- Will there likely be substantive findings and recommendations?
- Is this the best use of JLARC resources? For example:
 - Is JLARC the most appropriate agency to perform the work?
 - Would the study be nonduplicating?
 - Would this study be cost-effective compared to other projects (e.g., larger, more substantive studies take longer and cost more, but might also yield more useful results)?
- Is funding available to carry out the project?