

Objective #4 – Emerging Trends in Health Care Delivery and Technology

Purpose and Scope

RCW 43.370.030(3)(d) directs that the State Health Plan and Resource Strategy examine **emerging trends in health care delivery and technology** and assess how those trends may affect access to health care facilities and services, quality of care, and costs of care.

The statute also directs the plan to consider whether emerging trends suggest potential changes to:

- the scope of facilities and services subject to Certificate of Need (CoN) review
- the criteria used to evaluate CoN applications

This section will identify major areas where health care delivery, technology, system organization, population drivers, and societal pressures are changing and explore how those changes may influence the planning and regulation of health care facilities and services.

Emerging trends evolve rapidly. This objective will focus on key areas of change and questions for exploration. Partner feedback will help refine topics examined in the final report.

I. Overarching Questions

Across all topic areas, this objective will explore several cross-cutting questions:

- What are the most significant emerging trends in health care delivery and technology?
- How are these trends changing where and how health care services are delivered?
- Are current regulatory and planning frameworks keeping pace with these changes?
- What role may artificial intelligence and advanced analytics play in health care delivery, administration, and health system planning?
- What infrastructure, workforce capacity, and data systems are needed to support the adoption of emerging technologies while ensuring equitable access?
- How can data privacy and security be protected as new technologies and digital health tools expand?
- How might federal and state policy changes affecting health coverage, workforce supply, or reimbursement influence emerging trends in health care delivery, technology adoption, and system capacity over time?

II. Framework for Evaluation of Emerging Trends

For each area of system change, the analysis will examine how emerging trends may affect:

Access to health care facilities and services

- Availability of services across geographic regions
- Changes in where care is delivered
- Potential barriers to accessing services
- Changes in health care networks

Quality of care

- Effects on clinical outcomes, patient safety, and patient views on quality
- Continuity and coordination of care
- Reliability and appropriateness of emerging technologies or delivery models

Costs of care

- Impacts on health system spending
- Effects on patient affordability
- Potential for duplication of services or changes in health system efficiency

This evaluation framework will help identify whether emerging trends have implications for health system planning and for the Certificate of Need program.

III. Areas of System Change

The emerging trends analysis will examine several areas where significant changes are occurring in health care delivery and system organization.

1. Changes in Care Delivery Models

Health care delivery models are evolving as new technologies, payment structures, and patient expectations reshape where and how care is provided.

Topics for exploration may include:

- Telehealth and hybrid care models
- Hospital-at-home programs and home-based care
- Mobile clinics providing services such as behavioral health crisis care, vaccines, dental care, mammography, and vision services
- Expansion of urgent care and other outpatient care settings

- Repurposing existing buildings, such as retail spaces, for health care services
- Shared administrative services for independent medical practices

Questions for exploration include:

- How are new care delivery models changing where patients receive care?
- How do outcomes and continuity of care compare across different care delivery settings?
- How might these trends affect future demand for traditional health care facilities?
- Do these models raise new considerations for how need for services is evaluated?
- Do new delivery models reduce overall health system costs or shift costs to other parts of the system?

2. Technology Transformation in Health Care

Advances in digital technology are rapidly changing how health care is delivered, monitored, and managed.

Topics for exploration may include:

- Artificial intelligence in clinical decision support and administrative processes
- Mobile health applications and wearable devices
- Remote patient monitoring technologies
- Digital tools for chronic disease management
- Data analytics and population health management systems

Questions for exploration include:

- How might emerging technologies change the delivery of health care services?
- How do emerging technologies affect clinical decision-making, patient safety, and quality of care?
- Do these technologies expand or limit access to care for certain populations?
- What infrastructure is required to support widespread adoption of new technologies?
- Do new digital health technologies reduce system costs or introduce new cost drivers?

3. Changes in Health System Organization and Ownership

The organization and ownership of health care providers continue to evolve, with implications for service availability, market competition, and system costs.

Topics for exploration may include:

- Consolidation and separation among health systems
- Vertical integration between providers, insurers, and other entities
- Private equity ownership of health care organizations
- Shared administrative services across provider groups

Questions for exploration include:

- How do organizational changes affect service availability and health care markets?
- Do these changes influence how health care services are distributed geographically?
- Are there implications for how new facilities or services should be evaluated?
- How do changes in ownership or organizational structure affect quality outcomes, cost, and care coordination?

4. Population, Workforce, and Policy Drivers of Demand

Changes in population demographics and workforce supply influence demand for health care services and the capacity of the system to provide care.

Topics for exploration may include:

- Aging populations and increased demand for chronic disease management
- Immigration and demographic shifts affecting care demand
- Health care workforce shortages and changes in workforce composition
- Federal policy changes affecting health care coverage and health care workforce eligibility

Questions for exploration include:

- How will demographic changes affect future demand for health care services?
- How will demographic changes vary across geographic regions?
- How might demographic and workforce trends affect health system costs or resource allocation?
- How might workforce trends influence where services can be sustainably provided?
- How might changes in coverage eligibility affect demand for health services?
- How might the availability of health care professionals vary in different regions of the state in response to changes in federal workforce policies (e.g., HB-1 visa eligibility)?
- What implications could these changes have for health system capacity and service availability?

5. Financial Sustainability of Health Care Facilities

Financial pressures on health care providers may affect the availability of services and the stability of the health system. Changes in federal coverage or workforce policies may affect the financial sustainability of health care facilities by influencing payer mix, uncompensated care levels, and labor costs.

Topics for exploration may include:

- Financial insecurity among hospitals and health systems
- Facilities facing severe financial distress
- Closure or consolidation of hospital service lines
- Financial pressures facing rural and critical access hospitals

Questions for exploration include:

- How might financial pressures affect the availability of services across different regions of the state?
- How might financial pressures affect staffing levels, service quality, or care outcomes?
- Are certain services becoming more centralized or less available in some communities?

6. Health Information and Patient Decision-Making

Changes in how individuals access and interpret health information may influence health behaviors, care-seeking decisions, and demand for health services.

Topics for exploration may include:

- Increased reliance on online health information
- Social media influence on health behaviors
- Health misinformation and vaccine hesitancy
- Changing levels of trust in health institutions

Questions for exploration include:

- How does increased access to online health information affect how, when, where, and whether people seek professional care?
- How do changes in patient health care utilization in response to online information influence health care costs?
- How does misinformation or non-medical “health advice” about health conditions or treatments influence health outcomes?
- Are there opportunities for health systems or public health agencies to improve access to reliable health information?

IV. Implications for Certificate of Need

Emerging trends in health care delivery and technology may affect how health care facilities and services are planned and regulated and may suggest potential updates to the Certificate of Need (CoN) program.

The analysis will focus on two types of potential implications:

- whether emerging trends suggest changes to the scope of facilities and services subject to CoN review, and
- whether emerging trends suggest updates to the criteria used in CoN application review.

Under current law (RCW 70.38), CoN review evaluates proposals based on several factors, including population need, availability of alternative delivery models, financial feasibility, accessibility of services, efficient use of existing resources, quality of care, and the potential impact of proposed services on health system costs and community access. Emerging trends may influence how these factors are interpreted or applied.

Because emerging trends vary widely in their potential impact, not all trends will warrant regulatory changes. This approach will consider whether trends rise to a level where they materially affect health system capacity, service availability, or delivery models.

Evaluating Whether Trends Affect the Scope of CoN Review

Some emerging trends may introduce new types of facilities, services, or care delivery models that are not currently reflected in the scope of the CoN program.

Questions for exploration include:

- Do emerging care delivery models change where or how health care services are delivered?
- Do these models create new types of facilities or services not currently included in CoN review?
- Do emerging technologies enable services to be delivered outside traditional facility settings?
- Could rapid growth of certain services lead to unnecessary duplication of facilities or services?

Examples of trends that may raise questions about CoN scope include:

- hospital-at-home and other home-based care models
- expansion of ambulatory and outpatient services
- emerging specialty treatment technologies
- new types of care facilities or service sites

The analysis will explore whether these developments suggest the need to reconsider which facilities or services should be subject to CoN review.

Evaluating Whether Trends Affect CoN Review Criteria

Other emerging trends may not require changes to the scope of facilities and services subject to CoN review but may influence how CoN applications should be evaluated.

Questions for exploration include:

- Do emerging care delivery models change how need for facilities or services should be measured?
- Should evaluation of need account for shifts toward telehealth, outpatient care, or home-based services?
- Do advances in digital health technology affect how capacity or utilization should be assessed?
- Do organizational changes in the health system affect how competition, cost, or service availability should be evaluated?

Examples of trends that may influence CoN review criteria include:

- telehealth and hybrid care delivery models
- advances in digital health technology
- consolidation or separation among health systems
- changes in patient utilization patterns
- changes in patient care networks

The analysis will consider whether these trends suggest updates to how need, service availability, or system capacity are evaluated in CoN review.

Threshold for Regulatory Consideration

This objective will consider whether trends meet one or more of the following conditions:

- The trend significantly changes where or how care is delivered.
- The trend creates new facility types or service categories not subject to CoN review.
- The trend affects how service need, capacity, or utilization should be measured.
- The trend has the potential to substantially affect health system costs or duplication of services.

Partner feedback will help identify emerging trends that may warrant further evaluation for potential regulatory implications.