

Top Priority Identified for Spokane County: Childcare

Priority Spokane's assessment process has led to local improvements that have had national impacts.

Spokane, WA: Last week Priority Spokane selected childcare as a top priority for Spokane County. Priority Spokane's board of directors reviewed the top four priorities previously selected by over 1,700 informed citizens, evaluated additional research, debated and discussed, and ultimately selected childcare as the top priority for Spokane County based on Priority Spokane's unique prioritization criteria. Childcare was seen as a vital issue that is a root cause of other problems and an area where Priority Spokane could make a measurable difference in the next 3-5 years.



"There is considerable need in all 4 of the top priority areas, however, Priority Spokane is uniquely positioned to make a measurable difference in Childcare in the next 3 years," said Priority Spokane Executive Director, Ryan Oelrich. "With childcare, we have partners who have already stepped up and are ready to get to work on this issue for our region."

Here are some of the data-driven reasons childcare was selected:

1. **Children who are properly cared for are likely to be healthier and more successful later in life.**
2. **Families experience less stress knowing their children are properly cared for.**
3. **A lack of childcare is a major barrier to staffing essential services from medical care to emergency services.**
4. **Appropriate childcare can help prevent child abuse and neglect.**
5. **A lack of childcare is a major obstacle to economic growth in Spokane County.**

The top 4 Priorities:

1. Provide greater access to mental health services/resources to improve public safety.
2. **Expand childcare capacity to boost the economy.**
3. Expand the tree canopy to enhance the environment.
4. Explore alternative housing such as shared equity, tiny homes, co-housing, etc. to address housing issues.

The following criteria were used in selecting the priorities:

- An issue that affects the greatest number of residents.
- An issue that has a disproportionate impact on minority communities.
- A condition that is unambiguously below or above where we want it to be.
- A condition that we want to preserve.
- An indicator that is predictive of other outcomes and positively impacts several goals.
- A condition that we, locally, have some opportunity to change.
- An issue we can impact on in 3-5 years.
- A focus that does not duplicate or conflict with existing efforts.

What's next?

Priority Spokane will establish a taskforce of community experts and partners. This taskforce will assess if additional research is needed, what aspect(s) of childcare will be the focus, assure the work doesn't duplicate or conflict with existing efforts, identify resources, and establish a timeline for assuring the work is accomplished.

About the process:

How are we doing? This is the question Priority Spokane asks every three to five years and then uses an award-winning and data-driven process to find the answer. Priority Spokane won the national Culture of Health Award in 2014 for helping to raise high school graduation rates from below 60% to over 80% in just five years' time. This was a direct result of the prioritization and assessment process.

This round's assessment started in October 2022 with 12 community meetings. These meetings have been co-chaired by area leaders including board members of Priority Spokane like Spokane County Commissioner Mary Kuney, past Spokane City Council Member Karen Stratton, and former Spokane Valley Fire Chief Greg Rogers. Additionally, Priority Spokane met with community groups including BIPOC, rural, individuals facing homelessness, LGBTQIA+, senior citizens, Native Americans, and more to obtain their feedback.

The assessment is led by Priority Spokane and the Spokane Indicators Project (www.SpokaneTrends.org) and its co-founder Dr. Patrick Jones, along with Priority Spokane's Executive Director, Ryan Oelrich. The assessment process strives to assure priorities are data-driven, community-selected, and equitable. Spokane Regional Health District partnered with the process to inform its latest Community Health Needs Assessment along with the Junior League of Spokane.

About Priority Spokane: Priority Spokane is an organization made up of 27 member organizations working collaboratively to identify and address priorities in Spokane County. Priority Spokane conducts an expansive community needs assessment every 3-5 years, and most recently identified the reduction of trauma and violence as a priority for the region. Visit www.PrioritySpokane.org for more information.

Priority Spokane has a rich history of doing important work locally that has gone on to make a difference nationally!

1. Increased graduation rates from 53% to over 80% in just five years earning Priority Spokane a national RWJF Culture of Health Award!
2. Completed a 3-year pilot project addressing student and family homelessness. The project housed 78% of the children and their families who participated. Three years later, 95% remained stable and without need of additional support. The model is now used by other organizations across the country!
3. Increased Peer Support in Spokane County by 30%; took peer support certification and training virtual statewide during the pandemic assuring over 800 peer counselors were trained and could provide support; provided free tutoring and support to over 200 high-need students during the pandemic; helped develop a stress and trauma curriculum (STEP) now used nationally!

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