

# Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services

## Opportunity Guide



[dshs.wa.gov](https://dshs.wa.gov)



# About the Department of Social and Health Services



The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is the cornerstone of human services in Washington state. As the largest agency, it employs over 20,000 people in close to as many full-time positions, encompassing more than 400 Washington General Service job classes. These roles include a wide range of professionals, such as licensed staff, case managers, IT experts, rehabilitation specialists, communicators, financial analysts, data experts, carpenters, and many others.

Each month, DSHS provides essential services—such as care, protection, and support—to roughly 2 million of Washington’s more than 7 million residents. DSHS is dedicated to becoming a national leader in client service across all its areas of focus.

Working collectively to serve clients across the state, DSHS is made up of four direct service administrations and three support administrations. United by a single mission, DSHS partners with people to help them access the support, care, and resources they need. DSHS serves one in three Washingtonians and represents roughly 18% of the state’s operating budget. These funds are used to fulfill DSHS’s mission, through direct services to residents in need as well as contracts with community providers to deliver additional services.

## DSHS Service Administrations

- Aging and Long-Term Support
- Behavioral Health
- Developmental Disabilities
- Economic Services
- Vocational Rehabilitation



# About the Department of Social and Health Services

Through regional administration and residential institutions, DSHS provides direct client services including program eligibility, needs assessments, case management, private and public facility licensing, certification and quality assurance, state facility operations and services, community residential services, and constituent resolution services.

The following major institutions are residential and managed solely by DSHS:

- Psychiatric hospitals (3): two adult, one child (1185 beds)
- Residential Habilitation Centers (4) for persons with intellectual disabilities (559 beds)
- Transitional Care Facility (Lake Burien) (12 beds)
- State Operated Living Alternatives (80) (225 beds)
- Children's State Operated Living Alternatives (eight beds)
- Residential Treatment Facilities (3) (Olympic Heritage Behavioral Health, Maple Lane, and Brockman) (352 beds)
- Special Commitment Center for sexually violent predators (127 beds), and two Secure Community Transition Facilities (52 beds) (179 beds for SVPs total)

In addition, DSHS operates 140 office locations throughout the state where it serves members of the public who are accessing the broad range of DSHS services.

DSHS vision is that people find human services to shape their own lives. Fulfilling this vision requires people to come together with a sense of belonging, common purpose, shared values, and meaningful work. It is crucial to the agency's vision that employees bring an equity, anti-racism, and social justice commitment to their work. DSHS strives to create greater access and affirming representation of the communities served, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, people with physical, behavioral health, and intellectual disabilities, elders, members of LGBTQIA+ communities, immigrants and refugees, and families building financial security.



“If you stay for a minute, if you stay for six months or a year or two years, you will be irrevocably changed by this work.” Hear from the staff at Lakeland Village, which serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Watch the *Works of the Heart* video [here](#).

# The Opportunity

Appointed by the Governor, the Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services serves as a member of the Governor's executive Cabinet. In this role, the Secretary leads the delivery of human services across Washington state, providing executive leadership, direction, and strategic vision. This includes overseeing the administration, integration, and coordination of services for vulnerable individuals and families facing economic, social, or health challenges. The Secretary holds ultimate authority to ensure that the department's programs align with its core mission, organizational values, and the Governor's priorities.

Under the Secretary's leadership, the department is organized into four direct service administrations that focus on providing client support, along with two non-direct service areas that offer essential support to the service administrations. The department delivers a wide range of services, including supplemental food and nutrition benefits, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, emergency medical care, psychiatric inpatient care for people with severe mental illness, residential habilitation centers for people with developmental/intellectual disabilities, community-based crisis and non-crisis residential services, in-home services, and support for other people most in need of safety-net services. DSHS also provides regulatory and compliance services such as Adult Protective Services and is responsible for the licensing and surveying of all long-term care facilities in Washington.

Additionally, the department partners with community providers, other state agencies, federal and local organizations, and 29 tribal governments to develop programs that address critical health and social issues impacting Washington's residents and their communities.

## The 10 direct reports to this position are:

- Aging and Long-Term Support Administration  
- Assistant Secretary
- Behavioral Health Administration  
- Assistant Secretary
- Developmental Disabilities Administration  
- Assistant Secretary
- Economic Services Administration  
- Assistant Secretary
- Facilities, Finance and Analytics Administration  
- Assistant Secretary
- Technology Innovation Administration  
- Assistant Secretary
- Office of Justice and Civil Rights  
- Senior Director
- Equity, Diversity, Access and Inclusion  
- Senior Director
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation  
- Director
- Chief of Staff



"It really does feel like you're turning the room into a work of art, making it something new." Hear from Anna Caffey in her first year of her painting apprenticeship under the guidance of journeyman Troy Moebius. Watch the *An Apprentice's Journey in Service* video [here](#).

# The Opportunity



The next leader of DSHS will have the opportunity to guide the agency through a critical period of financial strategy and innovation, as they will be called on to navigate DSHS through changes to the statewide budget. Like several other states, Washington is facing a budget shortfall for 2025. The costs to maintain current services and program levels across the state for the next four years went up approximately \$12.6 billion due to inflation, higher projected caseloads in several safety net programs, expansion of popular programs like early learning, and workforce costs. While the role of Secretary is being hired, much of the state workforce is under a hiring freeze. This moment presents an opportunity to rethink workforce strategies and optimize resources to support Washington's communities effectively.

DSHS is the state's leading social services agency, providing assistance to individuals and families facing significant disadvantages. The department's programs, budgets, and actions are closely watched by the public and subject to intense scrutiny. The incumbent is responsible for managing the organization, services, budget, and client matters in alignment with the Governor's direction and legislative mandates. Due to the sensitive nature of the work, it is essential for the incumbent to communicate approaches and solutions to incidents and situations effectively to the media, Legislature, and public, while ensuring client confidentiality is protected by avoiding the use of specific details.

Accomplishing the mission of DSHS requires trusted relationships with partner agencies such as the Department of Health, Health Care Authority, Department of Children, Youth and Families, Office of Financial Management, and Governor's Policy Office as well as separately elected officials such as the Attorney General, State Auditor, and Insurance Commissioner;

federal agencies and regions; local governments; 29 tribal governments; multiple labor organizations across different segments of the workforce and provider community; and contracted entities as well as trusted partnerships with the state's philanthropic and community-based organizations.

Following the *Trueblood et al. v. Washington State DSHS* lawsuit, the state has made a significant commitment—investing more than \$2 billion—to enhance services and expand inpatient bed capacity for forensic competency restoration. The next Secretary will continue the transformative improvements and ensure the collaborations meet, and perhaps exceed, the required changes. The agency has collaborated with plaintiffs to develop a [Settlement Agreement](#) that provides a clear framework for progress. By continuing to innovate and strengthen the broader mental health system, including services for those who are civilly committed, DSHS can create a more effective, sustainable, and person-centered approach to forensic mental health care.

The incumbent must be able to effectively manage the various, sometimes conflicting, directives from the department's different administrations, ensuring they work together as a unified team.

Exemplary leadership, impeccable character, and a strong sense of public stewardship are essential for this role. The incumbent must be available 24/7 and capable of responding promptly and effectively to a diverse range of activities and initiatives at any given time.

# Performance Objectives

The following areas will measure success in the first year of the Secretary serving Washington state. While not all Performance Objectives will be complete, progress is hoped for in each area.

## Our Agency is Guided by Strategic Priorities

- Building economic justice.
- Making modern changes to behavioral health.
- Advancing person-centered services.
- Serving people in their home community.
- Innovating through technology.

## Vision and Strategy

- Ensure social and health programs are responsive to the needs of people living in Washington by establishing and implementing department goals and plans based on stakeholder input and need and are compliant with state and federal regulatory requirements.
- Set measurable objectives and goals that align with state priorities to ensure DSHS clients and Washington state are served to the best of the department's ability.
- Attract, secure, and retain talent so that all departments can carry out its mission of partnering with people to access support, care, and resources and ensure effective use of department resources and budget.
- Develop, align, and implement a department budget that makes the best use of the resources available based on realistic operating costs and projected future increases, amidst the state budget shortfall.
- Assist the Governor in setting their policies and priorities for providing social and health services to people living in Washington state.
- Bring a voice and actionable strategies around innovation to the Governor's Office and Executive Cabinet.

## Agency Transformation

- Advance a collaborative culture that fosters collaboration across departments, local governments, community organizations, labor unions, and advocacy groups to ensure a coordinated response to social and health challenges.
- Initiate deliberate partnerships with fellow cabinet members as subject matter experts, and collaborate inter- and intra-departmentally to move forward strategically and transparently, to equip all departments to provide a more complete suite of services to Washingtonians.
- Bridge the gaps between the administrations as well as other departments/administrations across the state.
- Eliminate administrative siloes within DSHS and seek to create a cohesive service delivery model that breaks down the bureaucratic elements and barriers to receiving services.
- Build partnerships with other state agencies serving the same clients DSHS serves with intent to streamline effort and make interaction with those served as seamless as possible, with a keen eye toward simplifying access to services for clients and their caregivers.

# Performance Objectives

## Relationship Management

- Set a standard of authentic and transparent communication in all relationships across the department, with peer departments, with labor and employees, tribes and tribal leaders, and with the public at large.
- Develop and maintain a culture of respect, dignity, equity, diversity and inclusion.
- Seek ongoing input from the public to align with the Governor's priorities to develop priorities, strategies, and implementation of appropriate programs so people have access to the appropriate array of services to improve the quality of life for all Washingtonians.
- Ensure satisfactory performance of staff by leading, developing, and motivating adequate training, setting reasonable organizational goals and strategies, and effectively implementing action plans.
- Provide testimony to the Legislature.
- Build alliances across diverse coalitions and political affiliations. Maintain strong working relationships with the Governor's Office, tribal nations, Legislature, and community partners to build and sustain adequate investment in the people DSHS Serves.



"We can actually see them right then and there, that same day ... and they will be able to have their benefits that same day, hopefully within two hours from when we open their cases." Learn more about *Same-day Benefits with the DSHS Mobile Office* [here](#).

# The Qualified Candidate

The successful candidate will be an agent of transformation and integration with a deep commitment to the mission of partnering with Washingtonians to access the support, care, and resources they need. The ideal next Secretary of DSHS will be a results-oriented, person-centric leader with vision and strategic acumen to guide the agency through financial uncertainty and increasing demand for services. They will possess the relationship-building skills, charisma, and political savvy necessary to establish a clear direction and rally stakeholders toward meaningful action.

This leader must maintain composure under pressure, solicit feedback, and objectively evaluate options with both short- and long-term impacts in mind. Bringing courage to challenge the status quo and make difficult but necessary decisions, the next Secretary will lead change in a way that is transparent, collaborative, and sustainable. Strong communication skills, humility, and kindness will be essential in fostering trust and positive working relationships. Given the challenges ahead, the Secretary must effectively balance competing interests while clearly articulating a vision and making thoughtful, well-communicated decisions that inspire confidence and drive progress.

Don't check off every box in the requirements listed above? Please consider applying anyway! Studies have shown that underrepresented communities - such as women, people of color, LGBTQ, people with disabilities, and immigrants - are less likely to apply to jobs unless they meet every single qualification. The Office of the Governor and DSHS are dedicated to building an inclusive, diverse, equitable, and accessible workplace that fosters a sense of belonging - so if you're excited about this role but your past experience doesn't align perfectly with every qualification in the job description, we encourage you to still consider submitting an application.

## Specific Requirements Include:

- Extensive and proven experience in government/nonprofit organizational leadership and strategic planning in a large multi-service organization.
- Knowledge, experience and accountability in strategic leadership, government/nonprofit organization and planning in a large multi-service organization.
- Management of a significant budget, which includes federal and state funds that are expended to serve individuals.
- Capacity to collaborate and coordinate the delivery of highly complex social services with other state agencies, federal agencies, local governments and external stakeholders.
- Respected as an innovative leader, driving for results and achieving performance goals.
- Ability and desire to influence current and future legislation and ability to implement executive and legislative policies, making internal policy decisions, which directly affect one in three residents of Washington state.
- Be of, and set an example for, the highest integrity in word and deed.
- Bring a strong and relatable/personal work ethic to the department, inspiring others to care for and work on behalf of others.
- Bachelor's degree in social science, public administration, business, political science, organizational development or related field. Applicable professional experience can substitute for degree requirement.



# How To Apply



The salary range for this position is expected to fall within the range of \$220,000 - \$250,000. The starting salary offer will be determined based on the successful candidate's qualifications. Please note that there is career salary growth beyond this starting range for the successful candidate.

Generous benefits are provided to all state employees and more information can be found here: <https://careers.wa.gov/benefits.html>. The primary work location will be Olympia, WA, along with necessary statewide and national travel as needed. Relocation support information is found here: <https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/legacy/policy/60.10.pdf>.

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate in any area of employment, its programs or services on the basis of age, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, marital status, race, creed, color, national origin, religion or beliefs, political affiliation, military status, honorably discharged veteran, Vietnam Era, recently separated or other protect-ed veteran status, the presence of any sensory, mental, physical disability or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability, equal pay or genetic information.

To ensure confidential tracking of all applicants, no applications will be accepted via email. ALL INQUIRIES WILL BE HELD IN STRICT CONFIDENCE.

All candidate-submitted materials and credentials will be reviewed for consistency and accuracy. Candidates can expect that KEES will verify employment/academic/background information both in the screening process and for the finalist(s) in a formal background check. KEES utilizes a 4-step screening process, the first of which is the formal Candidate Application. Applications are reviewed by the KEES team and advanced through various stages of inquiry and confirmation. Applications with specific cover letters will be given priority consideration, on a rolling basis, by March 14. All applicants will be notified of the outcome of the search. Based on the timing of your specific application, you are welcome to reach out for information on the timeline.

This search is being managed by Heather Eddy, President & CEO, and Megan Taylor, Project Manager, of KEES. Questions may be addressed to [mtaylor@kees2success.com](mailto:mtaylor@kees2success.com).

**APPLY HERE**



KEES (formerly Alford Executive Search) is a woman-owned nonprofit executive search firm dedicated to creating diverse teams with dynamic leadership in the nonprofit and public sectors. We offer a comprehensive range of services, including executive search, leadership development, compensation analysis, interim staffing, and HR support.

Launched in 2013, based on decades of prior work by the Founders, KEES is a leader and noted pioneer in DEIB-focused executive search and culture building. KEES is noted for bringing dynamic and under-radar candidates to the table, regularly placing industry veterans and first-time leaders alike. Recognized for two years in a row on the Hunt Scanlon Nonprofit Top 65, KEES leaders are sought-after experts in search, leadership development, and often first-time roles. To learn more, visit us at [www.kees2success.com](http://www.kees2success.com).

# Olympia, WA and Relocation

Although approximately 60% of Washington residents live in the Seattle metro area, there are smaller cities throughout Washington state that hold unique appeal and charm. Washington is a leading agricultural state along with industries such as aircraft, computer software, telecommunications, and lumber. Washingtonians enjoy a variety of outdoor recreational choices like Mount Rainier National Park and the Puget Sound and have top universities including Washington, Washington State, and Eastern Washington.

Olympia, the capital of Washington state, is also the county seat and largest city of Thurston County. It is 60 miles southwest of the state's most populous region, Seattle, and King County. The legislative cycle is two years long and is comprised of regular sessions and extraordinary/special sessions. Regular session starts mid-January and runs for either 60 or 105 days, depending on the year.

With a strategic geographic location along Interstate 5 at the gateway to the Olympic Peninsula, Olympia is within two hours or less of regional recreational attractions - from hiking and skiing in the mountains to beachcombing along ocean shores. Olympia is also within driving distance of Seattle and Portland with many cultural, entertainment, and sporting venues to offer.

Historic Downtown Olympia offers a variety of eclectic shopping and dining experiences, while Olympia's Westside is a regional shopping destination with the Capital Mall and Olympia Auto Mall.

Over 40 public parks are available for your recreation enjoyment. Public trails lead to saltwater beaches where native tribes once met for potlatches through woods thick with big-leaf maples and towering Douglas firs. Salmon return to Budd Inlet each fall and run the ladder under the Fifth Avenue Bridge.

