Pierce County Mental Health: A data-informed perspective. January 2020-December 2021

Assessment, Planning & Development
February 2023
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Abbreviations in this report

- **BEACON Health**: Behavioral Health – Administrative Service Organization
- **CARES**: Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security
- **CCS**: Catholic Community Services
- **CDC**: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- **COVID-19**: Coronavirus 2019 (SARS-CoV-2)
- **ED**: Emergency Department
- **MCIRT**: Mobile Community Intervention Response Teams
- **OUD**: Opioid Use Disorder
- **PCSD**: Pierce County Sheriff’s Department
- **SAMHSA**: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- **SUD**: Substance Use Disorder
- **U.S.**: United States
- **WA**: Washington State
Executive summary

Mental health is a state of emotional, cognitive and behavioral equilibrium. A person’s demographics, experiences, networks and systemic socioeconomic and cultural environments affect their mental health and wellbeing. Complex societal events have further impacted existing mental and behavioral health challenges in Pierce County.

We reviewed some key indicators to understand how mental and behavioral health has changed with societal events like COVID-19, targeted violence and political unrest. We reported other issues, like misinformation and extremism, to consider their impact. We found:

- Mental and behavioral indicators of negative health—like emergency department visits for depression or anxiety, violence and drug poisonings—increased in 2020 and 2021. The status of some, but not all, indicators improved from low points during these years, suggesting some resiliency.
- Sustained increases in youth crisis calls and eating disorders suggest youth mental health hasn’t begun to improve.
- Death by Suicide data are mixed, ranging from no change to an improvement. We may see delayed effects of mental and behavioral health on deaths by suicide in the future.
- Drug-related deaths and hospital visits sharply increased in recent years, with no signs of slowing down or improving.

Recommendations

Systemic changes to social determinants of health like poverty, structural racism, climate change and resources can greatly improve mental health. Cross-sector partnerships, investment and support of behavioral health education and early intervention are critical. Data show indicators haven’t improved for youth as much as for other age groups. In light of the recently enacted Pierce County behavioral health tax¹, we should track youth-centered interventions. Increased data disaggregation is critical to understand the needs of minoritized populations in Pierce County.

¹ https://www.piercecountywa.gov/7420/Behavioral-Health-Tax
Background

Mental health and wellness

Mental health is a state of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral equilibrium. Mental health affects how a person thinks, feels and acts. It also affects how a person handles problems, makes decisions and interacts with others. Like physical health, mental health is more than the absence of mental illness. It is the building and protecting of factors impacting various domains of mental wellbeing (e.g., trauma resilience).

Mental health affects and informs individual and collective health and wellbeing within domains of mental wellness (Figure 1). A state of mental wellness is shaped by the protective or harmful factors within these domains.

Figure 1: Domains of Mental Wellness

![Diagram of Mental Wellness Domains]

Poor mental health disrupts daily life for people, families and communities. It limits children's and youth's ability to succeed in school. Mental health crises create social and economic costs that affect many sectors, including health care, commerce, education, the criminal justice system, and emergency and social services.
Many people experience mental health issues in their life. According to National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), about 1 in 5 (20%) people living in the U.S. will experience mental illness in a typical year. In 2020, adults who identified as Multiracial and Non-Hispanic white reported experiencing more mental illness (18.7% and 35.8%, respectively) than other groups. Those who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual were nearly twice as likely to report experiencing mental illness than all other U.S. adult groups (47.4%).

Mental illness and wellness don’t exist in a vacuum. Social determinants provide a more complete picture of what influences mental illness and what it takes to bring about mental wellness. These are the conditions in which children, youth, and families are born, grow up, live and work. As with physical health, social determinants also influence mental health (Figure 2). Studies link poor quality housing conditions, food insecurity and systemic discrimination to poor mental health. Systemic changes to social determinants such as poverty, structural racism, climate change and resources can greatly improve mental health.

Figure 2: Social Determinants of Mental Health

Source: Image is adapted from “The Determinants of Health” (Dahlgren, G., & Whitehead, M., 1993) by The Mental Health Foundation, 2016.

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5 Social Determinants of Mental Health: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go - PMC [nih.gov]. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6181118/
Complex societal events

People and communities experience and process events differently. A life event or life circumstance may cause trauma for some, but not others. Life events and circumstances also cause varying personal and collective, direct and indirect, individual and confounding effects. Complex societal events have directly and indirectly affected or harmed Pierce County residents in 2020 and 2021. These types of events include: the COVID-19 pandemic, political strife, natural disasters, targeted violence and more. These types of events interact with and affect social determinants at different levels within society—often with time delays.

While many people can resume their lives, experts predict lasting societal change and mental health concerns from the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic created and exacerbated existing inequities within households and communities. It also created or added to physical and psychological stressors for residents of all socioeconomic backgrounds. Examples include:

- Economic stress, unemployment and housing instability.
- Physical separation from loved ones and increased feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- Grief and loss.
- Interpersonal violence and emotional separation.
- Pressures on parents and caregivers with young children.
- A cascade of emotions as Washington shifted back and forth through reopening.

Support systems meant to help people often brought more anxiety and frustrations. For example, stimulus checks may have inadvertently fueled alcohol and substance misuse. Locally and nationally, mental health service providers struggled to keep up, and wait times for services increased.

We explored the mental and behavioral health of Pierce County residents as they reacted to societal events in 2020 and 2021. See Appendix for a selected timeline of 2020 and 2021 events. This includes many of the public health measures enacted to reduce and slow down COVID-19 transmission, as well as many politically and socially important events. However, the timeline doesn’t reflect all events. Each may be meaningful in different ways to different people and populations. The timeline doesn’t include historic and ongoing concerns like systemic racism, climate change and inequitable access to mental health resources. This report is unable to explore the effects of generational inequities among the social determinants of mental health.

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8 This term has been used throughout this document to refer to events which have wide ranging impacts. This is not a standard term.
Figure 3 depicts some of the most common mental health indicators and behavioral health outputs that lead to symptoms of temporary and long-term mental illness. Figure 3 also highlights some of the complex societal events from the appendix that can affect local mental and behavioral health.

**Figure 3: Indicators of Mental Illness and Behavioral Health Outputs**

- **Mental Health Indicators***
  - Depressive symptoms
  - Anxiety (stress/worry)
  - Frequent mental distress
  - Suicide ideation
  - Chronic/new illness with concurrent mental health disorder**
  - Sleep disturbances**

- **Behavioral Health Outputs***
  - New/increased substance abuse
  - Increased substance/drug poisonings.
  - New/increased firearm acquisition
  - Suicide attempts/completions
  - New/worsening eating disorders
  - Worsening chronic conditions**
  - Increased community violence
  - Increased interpersonal violence

- **Complex Societal Events***
  - Structural Racism**
  - COVID-19 Pandemic
  - Global social-political upheaval
  - Economic changes
  - War**

*Selected lists
** Not addressed in this report
Indicators and data

Data from different domains can help us understand mental health and wellbeing in our society.

Mental health indicators

We used many different indicators to describe mental health and mental illness in our community. These include health systems resources as well as a variety of health indicators. Because of data availability, some indicators include a longer lag period than others and we may have incomplete data. This is especially true for deaths by suicide, as the full effects of the pandemic have likely not been fully realized.

Health system

Our complex health system has many different providers who support our residents’ mental health and well-being. These range from primary care providers to emergency rooms and dedicated mental health hospitals. Outside of these systems, crisis lines and non-governmental organizations provide formal and informal care. Availability and use of these systems vary by client, region and services needed.

Access to care

Medicaid serves low-income families and people. Medicare serves patients 65 and older. Both also provide services based on disability status. In Washington, more than 2 million people are enrolled in Medicaid. In Pierce County, about 246,000 people were enrolled in Medicaid (known as Apple Health in Washington) in 2021. Enrollment for 2021 for Medicare is not available yet, but 1.4 million people were enrolled in Washington in 2020. Together, these insurance programs cover more than 30% of Washington residents and are the primary sources of health insurance.

Medicare and Medicaid offer coverage for varying behavioral health services. However, emerging research demonstrates a provider omission, referred to as the Medicare Mental Health Coverage Gap (MMHCG). Currently, Medicare and Medicaid omit licensed mental health counselors and licensed marriage and family therapists as approved providers. This gap profoundly affects excluded providers and the communities they serve. This means 9,467 Mental Health Counselors, 2,588 Mental Health Counselor Associates, 2,245 Marriage and Family Therapists and 685 Marriage and Family Therapist Associates aren’t currently considered

approved providers.\textsuperscript{18} In addition, pediatric access to behavioral health providers showed significant disparities (Table 1).\textsuperscript{19}

**Table 1: Number of Providers per 10,000 Children Aged 0-17 Years, 2015, Pierce County WA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Pediatricians</th>
<th>Psychiatrists</th>
<th>Family Medicine Physicians</th>
<th>Licensed Social Workers</th>
<th>Psychologists</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data on anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation were equally poor and became worse each year.\textsuperscript{20} In 2021, less than 50\% of Medicaid members with a mental health service need received mental health services (Table 2).

**Table 2: Medicaid Access to Behavioral Health Services, 2021, Pierce County WA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional Service Area</th>
<th>2019Q2</th>
<th>2020Q2</th>
<th>2021Q2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
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Data from WA State Health Care Authority, 2022.

During the pandemic, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) performed the Household Pulse Survey. From Dec. 1-13, 2021 (last period of study in 2021), 16\% (CI: 13.5 – 18.7) of Washington residents needed counseling or therapy but didn’t get it in the last 4 weeks. 33.6\% (CI: 31.0-36.3) had symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorders.\textsuperscript{21}

The COVID-19 pandemic and MMHCG also interfered with clients’ access to services because they lacked Medicare and Medicaid-eligible providers in their region. For example, beneficiaries who reside in rural areas have more difficulty finding mental health providers because of a shortage of providers in these areas. The pandemic made this worse.\textsuperscript{22,23}

### Crisis line calls

Crisis lines are a valuable resource for people who need to address mental health needs like suicide prevention or substance use disorder (SUD). Data on crisis line calls can reveal trends in mental health indicators. For example, about 50\% of callers seek more than mental health services.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{18} Washington State Department of Health, Health Provider Credential Data Portal. Accessed on September 15, 2022. Available at: https://data.wa.gov/Health/Find-a-

\textsuperscript{19} Health-Provider-Credential/k356-mc56


\textsuperscript{21} Healthy Youth Survey. 2021. www.AskHYS.net


Beacon (the Behavioral Health Administrative Service Organization of Washington) contracts with behavioral health providers to monitor and administer the care crisis system. Beacon offers crisis lines and mobile community intervention response teams (MCIRT) to help Pierce County residents in crisis through their contracted providers. Crisis lines can connect callers with referrals for services like counseling, detox, direct connections to responders or direct intervention services.

Staffing shortages at the start of the pandemic likely contributed to a reduction in the number of calls recorded and people served, thus affecting data interpretation. Calls in 2020 were likely higher than reported.

**Figure 4: Regional Crisis Line Calls by Month, 2019-2021, Pierce County**

- From April to August in 2020 and 2021, calls were significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels.
- The number of people served by MCIRT per month remained above pre-pandemic levels during 2020 and 2021 (data not shown).

Beacon also offers Youth Mobile Crisis Intervention services through Catholic Community Services (CCS). Staff offer services for youth ranging from one-time interventions, referral and care-coordination follow-up with mental health providers, and more intensive services for children at risk of out-of-home placement. Examples of mental health crises served include suicidal ideation, physical aggression, or parent and child conflict. Figure 5 shows the trends in youth referred to CCS.

- The number of youths referred for mobile crisis encounters through CCS decreased early in the pandemic.
- Youth referrals rose significantly above prior year levels starting in March of 2021.
Mental health and illness

A subset of health indicators helps us better understand the burden of disease in our population. Depression and anxiety, eating disorders and self-harm are all expressions of poor well-being.

Depression and anxiety

Medical visits (either primary care or emergency department) for anxiety or depression as the main concern can potentially be an early warning sign for community mental health issues. Figure 6 shows how the rate of anxiety/depression-related emergency department (ED)/urgent care visits have changed over time.
Figure 6: Rate of Emergency Department (ED)/Urgent Care Visits with a Chief Concern of Anxiety/Depression (per 10,000 visits), April 2019 – December 2021, Pierce County

- The rate of ED visits from anxiety/depression decreased during the first two trimesters of 2021, falling below 2019 levels. This decrease could coincide with the easing of COVID-19 quarantine restrictions and increasing vaccine availability.
- Concerns and media discussion of a ‘double pandemic’ (flu and COVID-19) may have contributed to the rate increase in fall 2021.
- People who identified with more than one race, whites and American Indians/Alaskan Natives consistently had the highest rates of ED visits from anxiety/depression compared to other races (data not shown).
- The emergence of the Delta variant brought a higher number of COVID-19 cases as many people returned to the office and school. That appears to have had negative effects, as the rate relatively increased by 71% in the fall of 2021 (August-November) before reaching its peak in November. Overall, both primary care (not shown) and ED visits increased during the fall of 2021.

**Eating disorders**

Food production and supply is another example of the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on health. As companies dealt with worker outbreaks and transportation challenges, delivery of some materials and goods was delayed or canceled.\(^{25}\)

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Food production disruptions can disproportionately harm the well-being of people who suffer from eating disorders, who often fixate on certain types of foods or specific brands. For example, if certain healthy or desired foods aren’t available or have limited stock, people may relapse into starving themselves or hoarding because of limited quantities.

As a result, some may develop post-traumatic stress disorder and become more susceptible to developing disordered eating patterns. Other people may become more sensitive to developing disordered eating patterns because their regular coping routines and mechanisms were disrupted. Both can lead to a sense of helplessness or loss of control. To try to cope or regain control, some people may binge or restrict food.

**Figure 7: Rate of Primary Care Visits with a Chief Concern of an Eating Disorder (per 10,000 visits), April 2019 – December 2021, Pierce County**

- The rate of eating disorder-related primary care visits increased around the time COVID-19 arrived in Pierce County (March-April 2020). This rate may represent people who had previously had minor episodes of disordered eating or those susceptible to these diseases before the pandemic.
- The rate briefly decreased in the spring of 2020 but remained elevated for the rest of the year.
- The rate increased during the first quarter of 2021. Girls aged 12-17 had the highest rate of primary care visits because of an eating disorder in this period, with a peak of 123 per 10,000 primary care visits.

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30 Based off ESSENCE query “Eating Disorders V1”.
• The rate of primary care visits because of an eating disorder decreased in the summer of 2021 (June – August). This was around the time COVID-19 restrictions began to loosen in Washington.
• Since September 2021, the rate was lower than 2020 levels but higher than pre-pandemic levels (2019).

Self-harm

Studies have shown that the number of deaths by suicide and self-harm events increased during the lockdown compared to the time before the pandemic (pre-2020), even when the total number of ED visits doesn’t support this. The death by suicide rates in the last few years have steadily increased. People who had COVID-19, especially those with severe illnesses or long-COVID-19, are at an increased risk of suicide. Self-harm with and without suicidal intent or ideation are overlapping behaviors with considerable cross-over and common risk factors. However, they have some distinct characteristics that separate them. We got information about emergency department and urgent care visits for concerns related to self-harm or intentional injury from the ESSENCE data base.

• Month-to-month data shows 2020 rates were higher than 2019, with the largest increase in the spring (March-May 2020). This corresponds to the beginning of the pandemic and when COVID-19 restrictions were initially enforced.
• 2020 rates remained elevated compared to 2019, with people ages 18-44 years making up most ED visits.
• Rates in 2021 were at or below 2019 levels. We saw a brief increase in Oct 2021 (58.9% relative increase from September 2021), but the rate decreased the following month (November 2021).
• Although people ages 18-44 years continued to have the highest rate of ED visits related to self-harm, the rate in December 2021 (25 per 10k ED visits) was less than half of the peak (April 2020, 67 per 10k ED visits).

Death by suicide

While death by suicide overlaps with self-harm (mentioned above), it has its own distinct characteristics.

Crisis line calls

Crisis lines respond to calls with concerns of suicide and suicidal ideation, among other issues. Beacon providers responded to more than 100 calls each month for people with suicide concerns.

• Data capture and management systems changed in 2020, preventing comparison with 2019 (data not shown).
• Beginning in March 2021, calls with suicide concerns significantly increased (Figure 8).

34 Mental health advocates often use the term “died by suicide,” as it removes culpability from the person who died and allows a discussion about the disease or disorder from which they were suffering.
Emergency department and urgent care visits

- The rate of ED/urgent care visits (per 10,000 visits) related to suicidal ideation remained stable from April 2019–February 2021 (data not shown).
- From February-August 2021, the rate of ED/urgent care visits from suicidal ideation relatively decreased by 44.8% (ending at 116.1 per 10k ED/urgent care visits). Although this timeframe corresponds to several public health measures/restrictions being lifted, it does not prove causation.
- The rate returned to early 2021 levels in September-October 2021 but remained below 2019 levels (by an average of 20-30 per 10k visits).

Suicide calls for service

Pierce County Sheriff’s Department reported the number of calls that included either attempted death by suicide or suicide threats. Suicide-related calls in 2020 and 2021 were at or below pre-pandemic levels.
Deaths by Suicide

Death by suicide is a stark indicator of mental health status. The number of documented deaths by suicide in Pierce County was largest in 2019 and has since dropped. They appeared to drop in early 2021, only to rebound to pre-pandemic levels. Suicides may occur long after the initial triggering events. Documenting the long-term effects of the past few years will require a longer period of data collection.

Figure 10: Documented Deaths by Suicide, 2019-2021, Pierce County

Retrieved: August 2022, *2021 data are preliminary
Behavioral health outputs

Although we can relate behavioral health indicators below to poor mental health, they are not always related. However, drugs and violence often increase as a result of mental health status. A bi-directional relationship often exists between poor mental health and substance use disorder (SUD).\(^{35,36}\)

Illicit drug use trends

We use the term poisoning instead of overdose to align with national anti-stigma efforts and Washington State Senate Bill 5380.\(^{37}\) In this case, the drug is the product that is used in the wrong way, by the wrong person, or in the wrong amount. This does not mean that people were poisoned. People use legal and illegal drugs for various reasons (experimentation, entertainment, socialization, various dependencies, etc.). Not everyone who misuses opioids or other drugs experience Substance Use Disorder (SUD) or Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). Some people who use opioids as prescribed develop OUD from physical dependence. This can lead to them using heroin, fentanyl\(^{38}\) and other illicit drugs.

Drug use trends are drastically changing. A survey of Pierce County youth suggests increased abuse of suppressants like cough medicine and anti-anxiety medications.\(^{39}\) Those in the illegal drug trade add illicit fentanyl to street-level drugs like heroin, and counterfeit prescription pills and stimulants to elevate potency. Some people might think they are using one substance and end up with a more dangerous effect. Intentional fentanyl use is growing because of its desired effects\(^{40}\), rapid-onset OUD and waning heroin supply. Young adults ages 20-30 have been particularly impacted.\(^{41}\)

People seeking treatment, counseling and support to overcome OUD have experienced many more barriers since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Access to care has changed as described in this report. On March 16, 2020, the Federal government issued an exemption to Opioid Treatment Programs (OTPs) rules. States could increase access to medication for use at home for opioid treatment depending on the stability of the patient. This exemption enhanced and encouraged use of OTP services.\(^{42}\)

Fatal drug poisoning

Many of Pierce County’s recent drug poisoning deaths included more than one drug (Figure 11). In 2019, Pierce County deaths were flattening with the state and trending downward. Both fentanyl and stimulant (e.g., methamphetamine) deaths rose dramatically in 2020 and 2021. Fentanyl use and a diminishing heroin supply might explain the reduced heroin poisoning deaths.

\(^{38}\) Fentanyl is a strong and fast-acting pharmaceutical opioid used to manage severe pain. It is largely undetectable and is 80-100 times stronger than morphine.
\(^{39}\) Pierce County Healthy Youth survey (2016-2018)
\(^{40}\) Desired effects include a desired sensation or experience, a coping strategy or “getting well” from discomforts of physical withdrawal, etc.
\(^{41}\) Dramatic Increases in Opioid Overdose Deaths Due to Fentanyl Among Young People in WA. https://adai.uw.edu/new-report-youth-fentanyl
An uptick in deaths involving prescription pain medications and/or methadone occurred after 2019 (Figure 12). The number of methadone-related deaths between 2020 and 2021 was higher than in 2019. But, the percentage of methadone-related deaths was lower than between 2017 and 2018.
Non-fatal drug poisonings

Among opioid-related Emergency Medical System (EMS) first responder calls between 2020 and 2021:

- We find periodic non-fatal poisoning surges, as both accidental and intentional fentanyl use increased.
- Call trends were consistent with trends in ED visits and anecdotal reports of poisoning events.

Figure 13: EMS Opioid Responses, January 2020-December 2021, Pierce County

Figure 14: Rate of ED/Urgent Care Visits with a Chief Concern of a Drug Poisoning (per 10,000 visits), January 2020-December 2021, Pierce County
Figure 14 shows the rate of emergency care and urgent care visits with a chief concern of drug poisoning (per 10,000 visits).

- The rate of ED visits (from any drug) spiked when the pandemic entered the U.S. However, this also coincided with increased fentanyl street presence.  
- The rate of drug poisoning ED visits from summer to mid-autumn of 2020 remained somewhat constant. 
- The rate decreased in the winter of 2020, then spiked in the spring of 2021. 
- 2021 rates remained largely above 2019 and 2020 levels.

**Violence**

Physical violence can be an interpersonal expression of mental health status of individuals, both as victims and perpetrators. Poor mental health is not necessarily tied to an increased risk for carrying out physical violence. For this report, we categorized data into three groups:

1. School and youth related
2. Firearms related
3. Part of a domestic-violence event

See the City of Tacoma’s youth violence report for additional information.

**School violence**

Events in 2020 and 2021 led to multiple disruptions in school curriculums and methods of learning. Schools moved from in-person to remote learning, or a hybrid of the two methods (in-person and virtual). These changes have the potential to create stress on school staff, parents and students and can lead to negative outcomes like bullying, harassment, and other forms of violence.

A nationwide study of 14,966 people (including 9,370 teachers and 860 administrators) from July 2020-June 2021 showed many educators had safety concerns.

- Nearly 50% of teachers thought about quitting or changing jobs to another district because of safety concerns or an unsupportive work environment.
- One in three teachers experienced at least one incident where the student verbally threatened them or threatened violence against them.
- School staff (paraprofessionals, counselors, school resource officers and instructional aides) were the most likely to have experienced physical violence from students (22%).

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43 ESSENCE Query based off CDC All Drug v2
46 “Verbally threatened vs. threatened violence” – This is the difference between threatening to directly commit violent acts against someone, vs. wishing someone commits violent acts against them.
More than 40% of school administrators reported receiving verbal threats from parents. \(^{47}\)

Pierce County did not escape these negative outcomes. According to the 2021 Healthy Youth Survey:
- 18% of 10th graders said they did not feel safe at school
- 13% said they were bullied at school
- 13% said they were bullied online
- 11% said these feelings about being unsafe led them to miss school. \(^{48}\)

We can’t compare data from Healthy Youth Surveys before 2019 to 2021 data because of several potential confounding factors (remote learning, presence of adults during survey administration, etc.) As a result, data from previous surveys (pre-pandemic) are not shown.

**Firearm violence**

When families with individuals that have risk factors for self-harm and mental health concerns get firearms, the potential for violence in the home or surrounding community increases. \(^{49}\) Recent studies show increases in the number of firearm-related injuries during the pandemic. \(^{50},^{51}\) The 2020 national rate was the highest since 1994 (6.1 per 100,000 persons). According to CDC, non-Hispanic Black or African Americans males aged 10-44 and non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN) males aged 25–44 years experienced the largest rate increases for firearm-related homicides. Firearm homicide rates were higher and showed larger increases at higher levels of poverty. \(^{52}\)

Mass shooting events have become numbingly common. [https://usc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&wopisrc=https://tpchd.sharepoint.com/sites/com-services/_vti_bin/wopi.ashx/files/09a0625985394b91adb04b753e269d94&wdenableroaming=1&wdfr=1&mssc=1&hid= C5B891A0-4048-D000-C37F-599A138B584B&wdorigin=Other&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=21ee7e8a- 1f8e-4a90-88c7-22638c36e5f1&uid=21ee7e8a-1f8e-4a90-88c7-22638c36e5f1&sftc=1&cac=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlus h&rt=Normal&ct=LeastProtected](https://usc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&wopisrc=https://tpchd.sharepoint.com/sites/com-services/_vti_bin/wopi.ashx/files/09a0625985394b91adb04b753e269d94&wdenableroaming=1&wdfr=1&mssc=1&hid= C5B891A0-4048-D000-C37F-599A138B584B&wdorigin=Other&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=21ee7e8a- 1f8e-4a90-88c7-22638c36e5f1&uid=21ee7e8a-1f8e-4a90-88c7-22638c36e5f1&sftc=1&cac=1&mtf=1&sfp=1&instantedit=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlus h&rt=Normal&ct=LeastProtected)

The year 2020 was the first time more than 600 mass shooting incidents (four or more people shot or killed) were reported across the United States, compared to a previous high of

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\(^{48}\) Healthy Youth Survey, 2021.


417 in 2019.\textsuperscript{53} This continued in 2021 (and 2022). Many incidents targeted specific racial, ethnic, or LGBTQIA+ communities with their violence. Several mass shooting events were documented and discussed extensively in the national media\textsuperscript{54} and on social media. Each of these events had a ripple effect on populations, affecting those within and outside the communities,\textsuperscript{55} no matter where they live. We cannot readily measure these impacts, individually or in aggregate, but want to acknowledge the impact of these events on the mental health and well-being of Pierce County residents.\textsuperscript{https://usc-word-edit.officeapps.live.com/we/wordeditorframe.aspx?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&wopisrc=https://tpchd.sharepoint.com/sites/com-services/_vti_bin/wopi.ashx/files/09a0625985394b91adb04b753e269d94&wdenableroaming=1&wdfr=1&mscc=1&hid=C5B891A0-4048-D000-C37F-599A1388584B&wdorigin=Other&jsapi=1&jsapiver=v1&newsession=1&corrid=21ee7e8a-1f8e-4a90-88c7-22638c36e5f1&userid=21ee7e8a-1f8e-4a90-88c7-22638c36e5f1&ufc=1&mtf=1& Laurelcheck=1&wopicomplete=1&wdredirectionreason=Unified_SingleFlush&rct=Normal&ctp=LeastProtected}

**Firearm background checks**

Researchers generally view background checks for firearm purchases as a proxy for firearm demand. We used data from National Instant Criminal Background Check System to learn how firearm demand changed over time.

Both Washington and federal law prohibit felons from possessing firearms. Licensed sellers run a background check every time they sell a firearm.\textsuperscript{56} Some issues with background check data include:

- Typical firearm-buying trends spike in spring.
- Background checks don't always equate to single gun sales. Checks may be for multiple gun purchases.
- The law doesn't require private gun sellers to run background checks before sales.
- Perpetrators of violent crime don't always purchase or own a gun legally.

\textsuperscript{53} https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls
\textsuperscript{56} RCW 9.41.010 Firearms and Dangerous Weapons: https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=9.41
Figure 15: Firearm Background Checks by Month, Washington

- We see an isolated spike in firearm sales in June 2019. This appears to be a temporary spike in response to Initiative 1639’s introduction to the legislature.57
- Washington58 saw an increase in firearm sales in 2020 compared to prior years, particularly in June 2020 when the state reopened. Locally, South Sound 911 launched its online application process for Concealed Carry permits in June 2020 after not offering in-person services for many months.
- Early 2021 saw the same elevation in checks as the end of 2020 which decreased as the year progressed.

Emergency department and urgent care visits

Evidence shows a link between gun violence and mental health problems.59 Hospitalization for a firearm-related injury is associated with a higher risk for additional violent victimization or crime perpetration.60 Figure 16 compares the rate of firearm-related ED/urgent care visits in 2021 to 2019 and 2020. Due to data availability issues, information before March 2019 wasn’t available.

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58 National Instant Criminal Background Check System data are only available at the State level: https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/nics_firearm_checks_-_month_year_by_state_type.pdf/view
Figure 16: Rate of ED/Urgent Care Visits with a Chief Concern of a Firearm-Related Injury (per 10,000 visits), April 2019–December 2021, Pierce County

- Firearm-related ED visit rates appear to have spiked in March and May of 2021. Most occurred among people aged 18-44 years, and people who identify with more than one race (age and race not shown).
- Firearm-related ED visit rates decreased from late spring to mid summer (May-July 2021) and gradually increased through mid-fall (Oct 2021). Visits first increased for ages 18-44 and 45-64 in July-August of 2021, while ages 5-17 increase in visits around September-October 2021.
- The rate for all races and ethnicities during the last two months of 2021 remained below 2020 levels suggesting some amount of return to normalcy. However, rates among non-Hispanic Black/African Americans and American Indian/Alaskan Natives remained above 2019 levels.

Gun-related crimes

Gun crime, gun violence and related homicides and unintentional deaths rose drastically in the U.S. in 2020 and 2021. From 2019-2020, the overall age-adjusted firearm homicide rate was 6.1 per 100,000 people. The largest rate increases were among males, people ages 10-24, non-Hispanic Black/African Americans and American Indian/Alaskan Natives. Given the increased gun sales and country’s reopening in 2021, experts predict this surge in firearm-related injuries, death and mass casualty events will continue.

Pierce County Sheriff’s Department (PCSD) reported gun-related-call trends in incorporated regions were consistent with unincorporated regions between 2019 and 2021. PCSD serves more than 875,000 residents

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county-wide including more than 400,000 in unincorporated areas. This service area is home to about 95% of Pierce County’s population. This agency is a mirror for Pierce County urban areas. According to PCSD: "As soon as we see particular crimes trending upward in Tacoma or Lakewood (urban areas), we see them increase in the rest of the county after a few weeks, at most. Criminals are no respecters of jurisdictional boundaries, so the crime creeps wherever targets/victims exist".63

Figure 17: Gun-related Offenses Reported to the Pierce County Sheriff's Department, 2019-2021

- Gun-related offenses sharply increased in the fall of 2020 and 2021.
- Offenses in 2021 remained at or above prior years.

**Domestic violence**

Domestic violence increased after lockdowns in many countries. Experts in domestic violence worldwide say the combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and domestic violence is a syndemic, or a synergistic relationship of biological and social interactions between conditions and states that increases harm all around.64

**Emergency Department and urgent care visits**

The rate of ED/urgent care visits related to domestic violence/sexual violence remained stable from April 2019–April 2021 (data not shown). We saw small increases in May 2020 and August 2020, particularly among the American Indian/Alaskan Native and non-Hispanic Black/African populations. The rate of ED/urgent care visits related to domestic violence/sexual violence gradually decreased from May 2021-December 2021.

National data are mixed. Some cities reported an increase in intimate partner/domestic violence cases. Others reported a decrease in the number of cases. This variability may be because of the prevalence of COVID-19 in

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63 Pierce County Crime Analyst from Pierce County Sherriff’s office. Interviewed June 2021.
the community and the resulting fear of getting infected when visiting a healthcare facility, or not having as much time away from a controlling partner. \textsuperscript{65,66}

**Pierce County Sheriff’s Department**

For domestic violence information, PCSD supplied data on domestic violence (DV)-related calls for service. These include calls for service in categories of physical, physical with a weapon and verbal abuse. Calls for service data reflect a single disposition recorded at the time of the call. Subsequent reports for these incidents might contain multiple offenses but are not reflected in calls for service data. PCSD reports confounding effects of technological issues, staff and volunteer loss, and burnout during 2020 and extending into 2021. They think the numbers are artificially low for 2020-2021.

**Figure 18: Domestic Violence Related Calls for Service Received by the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department, 2019-2021, Pierce County**

- Calls for domestic violence in 2020 remained at or above pre-pandemic levels.
- Calls in 2021 were found to be lower than prior years.


Potential correlates of mental health

We can see the state of mental and behavioral health in other aspects of society that are not typically noticed. Experiences at work and the current economic situation also correlate with mental health and behavioral health. Below are several non-traditional indicators associated with mental and behavioral health.

Unruly behavior in the air

The Federal Aviation Association reported 310 investigations of passengers for unruly behavior in 2004, the largest since 1995. Since 2004, the yearly number of investigations had been dropping and 2019 saw only 146 investigations. This number increased in 2020 to 183 despite fewer people traveling. As people resumed their normal travel patterns in 2021 investigations jumped to 1,099.

Extremism

Extremism and radicalization are difficult to define. We summarize them as beliefs that are not within the norms of society and have the potential to harm others. The number of hate groups with extremist beliefs is decreasing, but that may be because of the mainstreaming of their concerns. In 2020, active-duty or reserve military personnel committed 6.4% of all domestic terrorist attacks. This increase is up from 0% in 2018. Finally, the Anti-Defamation League indicates an increase in anti-Semitism and white supremacist propaganda.

The group Parents for Peace says “While radicalization is not usually thought of as a way to cope with an identity crisis or typical life struggles, research and the experiences of many families shows that this can be the case.” As adolescents determine their role in society, they are increasingly exposed to extremist beliefs. Societal events like the COVID-19 pandemic, social reform and political unrest have the potential to positively or negatively shape youth development.

Pierce County is not immune to extremist organizations and propaganda. The Anti-Defamation League created heat maps that present the location of extremist, terrorist, white supremacist or anti-Semitic events in 2020 and 2021. More than 650 occurred in Washington in 2020. About 80 happened in Pierce County. Observing increasing extremism may also harm mental health. Although we do not know the effect of...
extremism on mental health nor the effect of mental health on extremism, they are likely intertwined. We should monitor their interaction.

Harm from COVID-19 misinformation

As the COVID-19 Omicron variant became more prevalent in the U.S. in early 2022, it appeared to cause less severe symptoms compared to previous variants (Delta and Alpha). While data continues to support this hypothesis, some people believe Omicron is 'no worse than the common cold' or that it is 'very mild'. Some people with this view have tried to intentionally get sick because they believe catching COVID-19 is inevitable and Omicron presents the least dangerous option. This view is problematic as it assumes everyone will experience brief, mild symptoms of COVID-19 or none at all.

While the data seems to suggest the risk of severe illness is low, that’s not a guarantee. You also risk developing “long COVID,” defined as having symptoms more than 28 days after infection or having new or lingering symptoms after recovery. Getting an accurate diagnosis of long COVID is challenging. People might be asymptomatic when they were infected with COVID-19 but develop symptoms weeks later. Laboratory tests may not show anything out of the ordinary. Some patients report their medical professionals have ignored or dismissed their symptoms, suggesting the disease was mainly psychological. Combined, these factors can lead to increased anxiety and depression among people who suffer from long COVID.

Many people with long COVID have difficulty concentrating or remembering events and suffer fatigue. It can be hard for them to keep the lifestyle they had before contracting the disease. They may feel increasingly isolated from family, friends and coworkers, and not be able to participate in or enjoy activities as much as they did before. The fatigue, concentration and memory problems may cause some people to lose their jobs, further increasing levels of anxiety and depression.

Little is known about long COVID. Some people have falsely claimed the COVID-19 vaccine will prevent long-COVID. Others have pushed controversial, potentially dangerous treatments. In reality, no treatment or cure

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for patients suffering from long COVID exists. Some factors, like vaccination or having had the Omicron variant, can help lower the risk of developing long COVID. But risk still exists. Given the large increase in cases, more people will likely develop this condition with potential impacts on the mental health of Pierce County residents.

Economics

The pandemic increased unemployment, creating new mental health issues for some and exacerbating issues for others. Elevated levels of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation resulted from job loss and even short-term unemployment. People experiencing long-term unemployment have twice the risk factor for mental illness. Their risk of mortality is 1.6 times higher than in employed people.

The unemployment rate is the number of people who are employed compared to the number who may be employed (not necessarily the same population as those who file for unemployment). Washington reached its peak unemployment rate of 16.2% in April 2020, up from 4.1% in February 2020 prior to the COVID shutdown. Pierce County reached an unemployment rate of 18.1% in April 2020, up from 4.9% in February 2020. 2021 was characterized by a decrease in the unemployment rate from the peak in 2020. In December 2021, the unemployment rate in Washington was 4.0% and in Pierce County was 4.5%.

Unemployment varied across socioeconomic status and industry. Those making a lower income (less than $27,000 per year) lost jobs in 2020 at five times the rate of those making a mid-level income ($27,000- $60,000 per year). During the same period, we saw an increase in people making higher incomes of more than $60,000 per year. Lower-income households reported higher levels of mental health challenges. Increased stress and social isolation, decreased access to childcare, increased risk factors for child maltreatment and intimate partner violence contributed to mental health challenges among low-income households during the pandemic.

Costs of goods and services also continue to rise. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) measures the change in price of goods for urban consumers and is the most used economic indicator for inflation. The Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue metropolitan area rose by 4.6% from 2020-2021, a much larger jump than in previous years (Table 3).

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Table 3: CPI for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), 2016-2021, Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Annual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Congress expanded Unemployment Insurance and Economic Impact Payments in March 2020 through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. In the U.S., the poverty rate fell 1.5%—from 10.9% in pre pandemic 2020 to 9.4% for the second quarter of 2020—after CARES. Since relief efforts expired, poverty levels rose each month even as the unemployment rate declined. The increase in the poverty rate was notable in non-Hispanic Black/African Americans (3.1% increase), children and those without a high school education or less (17% increase). 87

**Workplace wellness**

Before COVID-19 was declared a national pandemic, the U.S. was already experiencing a shortage of healthcare professionals. In 2019, the federal government estimated it would take an additional 19,000 physicians and psychologists to eliminate trained healthcare worker shortages in the U.S. 88

Among those working in the field at the time, many were struggling to keep up. Reports estimated 35-54% of U.S.-based physicians and 45-60% of medical residents frequently experienced one or more mental health issues. If left untreated, this can result in “burnout,” which involves being emotionally exhausted, depolarized (cynical), and having a low sense of accomplishment from work. 89, 90

COVID-19 placed additional physical and mental demands on healthcare workers. Numerous safety precautions for COVID-19 patients (including poor communication and a low stockpile of personal protective equipment) led to many workers feeling stressed or anxious. Since COVID-19 is easily transmissible, many workers must wear additional layers of PPE when treating COVID patients. This can be physically and emotionally taxing.

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Many healthcare systems/hospitals didn’t have enough PPE for every worker.\textsuperscript{91} As a result, workers either went without PPE or reused items designed to be used once.\textsuperscript{92} Even if workers had appropriate PPE, guidance changed frequently in 2020-2021. With supply chain issues, many workers had to wait to get the latest version of recommended PPE. All these factors can lead to workers becoming stressed or anxious about potential COVID exposures, providing sub-optimal care to patients, and feeling unprepared in their jobs.

Since COVID-19 is easily transmissible, many isolation/quarantine guidelines were put in place to try to slow transmission (see the \textit{Appendix} for a partial list of major guidelines). Unfortunately, these guidelines led to many workers having to separate families and loved ones while in the hospital. The repeated nature of separating families can be traumatic. It can lead to increased anxiety, grief, and compassion fatigue.

Healthcare workers were not exempt from quarantine and isolation. Since many workers had the potential to be exposed to COVID-19 and subsequently pass it on, multiple restrictions prevented them from spending time with their families and loved ones. This created an increased sense of loneliness and a feeling of being a “bad” family member.\textsuperscript{93} Even if a worker could visit family, fear of passing the virus to vulnerable family members kept many apart. While quarantine and isolation can help slow transmission, it led to healthcare workers having higher rates of depression compared to the general population.\textsuperscript{94}

As COVID-19 spread, we saw an increase in anxiety/depression, insomnia, work overload, feeling of being undervalued, burnout\textsuperscript{95,96} and post-traumatic stress disorder.\textsuperscript{97} These fears were not equal, as certain groups were more likely to experience stress than others. Nurses, women, and front-line workers were more likely to experience anxiety and depression compared to their peers.\textsuperscript{98}

About one in five U.S. healthcare workers have quit their job since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic; an additional 20% considered leaving.\textsuperscript{99} This problem has been acutely felt in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, where an estimated 402,000 workers left the workforce from April 2020 - December 2021.\textsuperscript{100} With an increasing number of workers leaving their positions or quarantining, many healthcare facilities are experiencing staffing shortages. This places further stress on the remaining staff. In November 2021, more than 6,000 nursing positions were available in Washington. The Washington State Hospital Association

reported many of these jobs remain open for a longer period of time compared to 2019 (54% increase in the average duration of open position). ¹⁰¹

To boost staffing, many hospitals and healthcare systems turned to staffing agencies and “traveling nurses”. Travel nursing offers several advantages: better pay, schedule flexibility and a chance to fulfill intellectual curiosities.¹⁰² Since many assignments are limited to 3-5 months, travel nurses have a chance to recharge and avoid burnout. However, these limited assignments don’t lead to a stable salary, and regular staff may be distrustful of travel nurses. Additionally, travel nurses often face the same challenges as regular nurses like large workloads, having to separate families because of quarantine measures and spending too much time away from home.


Discussion

This mental health analysis revealed increased levels of stress and anxiety, but also showed encouraging signs of resiliency. As societal events and COVID-19 restrictions became more disruptive and people began losing control over aspects of their lives, residents turned to several outlets to try to regain some sense of control. Some had:

- Increased anxiety (seen through increasing ED visits and potentially through increasing number of firearm purchases).
- Anger or irritability (unruly flight behavior and school violence).
- New or worsened obsessions around food.
- Increased harms from drug use partially as a coping mechanism or distraction.

Others felt overwhelmed and needed immediate help in getting past a crisis, as evidenced by more crisis line calls.

In much of this, we see evidence of racial/gender disparities, with people of color and those who identify as multiracial often overrepresented. These data suggest the mental health burden may be greater among people in these groups than in other populations. A national survey showed racial and ethnic differences in substance use and suicidal thoughts during the months of the COVID-19 pandemic. We can’t make definitive conclusions about Pierce County residents because we can’t disaggregate county level data into smaller populations for every indicator.

Despite the increasing mental anguish, Pierce County residents showed signs of resiliency. After briefly increasing in 2020, self-harm related ED/urgent care visits fell to pre-pandemic levels. Domestic violence calls remained consistent. Fewer people called the Pierce County Sheriff threatening death by suicide in 2021 compared to 2019 and the number of deaths by suicide decreased.

Improvements during early 2020 could have been partly attributed to a strong sense of community or the feeling we’re all in this together. Unfortunately, this feeling seemed to have died in late summer 2020 as it became obvious the harm was not equally felt across society.

During the spring and summer of 2021, some indicators like ED visits for anxiety and depression appear to have temporarily improved before getting worse again. Our society was attempting to return to normal after what appeared to be the worst of the pandemic and the rollout of vaccinations. This hopeful time ended with the return of the Delta variant and increased transmission in the fall. Although it was only a temporary change, this suggests the pandemic and mitigation practices may have affected mental health among Pierce County residents.

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We didn’t observe increases in domestic violence. This is inconsistent with U.S. trends for 2020 showing an increase between 10-27% and as high as 33% globally.¹⁰⁴ The lack of the expected increase could be because of data artifacts, availability of services or other unidentified factors.

Different groups and populations were disproportionately affected by the pandemic and other traumatic societal events in 2020-2021. It will take time to fully understand the effects of the pandemic, political unrest and increased visibility in structural racism. Declaring racism a public health crisis¹⁰⁵,¹⁰⁶ is not the end, but the beginning of this process.

Mental health experts have begun to discuss the idea of “ambiguous loss.” It suggests large events with undetermined ends or beginnings may lead to longer grieving by some people¹⁰⁷ With ambiguous loss, people don’t have set ways to deal with change.¹⁰⁸

Unlike the return to normalcy seen in the adult population, few indicators improved for youth in the spring and summer of 2021. Youth crisis line calls and referrals for mobile encounters, along with ED/urgent care visits for eating disorders—concentrated in teenage girls—increased in 2020-2021 and remained higher. We also see alarming levels of violence in school settings.

While we don’t yet know the longer-term effects of the pandemic and related societal events the data suggests many Pierce County youth are still dealing with the events of the last two years. We don’t yet know how the pandemic and related societal unrest will affect suicide rates because this indicator takes a long time to develop. But the longer-term effects of stress and poor mental health are well documented.¹⁰⁹ We must closely monitor youth suicide rates moving forward.

¹⁰⁵ Devakumar, D., Selvarajah, S., and Shannon, G. (2020). Racism, the public health crisis we can no longer ignore. The Lancet. 395 (10242); E112-113. Available online 11 June 2020. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31371-4
Limitations

Many risk factors, behaviors and outcomes make up your mental health. Since mental health and behavioral health include so many different topics, we can’t review every illness. And stigma around mental health by providers ranging from EMS to emergency to primary care to law enforcement may lead us to underestimate the burden.

Many data points only became available during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results may be skewed, not only because of data availability but because people accessed care in different ways. For example, people were asked not to visit healthcare facilities unless they were very ill during parts of 2020. And some healthcare providers laid off staff as people used telemedicine more. Later in the pandemic, many healthcare providers left the workforce, which reduced the number of staff who could see patients. And some data sources changed data management systems in 2019 or 2020, which made it more difficult to observe trends.

Other changes in behavior, like spending more time with housemates and families, could lead to changes in drug poisoning or domestic violence rates. These changes make it difficult to interpret several data sources. We need more time to watch these changes and how they affect people.

We used data from the Pierce County Sheriff’s office to inform our data on calls for service and gun-related crimes. While the data includes most of Pierce County, it doesn’t cover every event. People who weren’t included in the data may have had different experiences. In addition, COVID-19 led to changes in jailing and booking practices. We should investigate how these changes affect data, along with changes in practice because of legal statutes.

We can’t use firearm background check data as proxies that link to a county or a subpopulation. People commit many firearm crimes with weapons they didn’t legally purchase. We can’t link background checks to specific morbidity or mortality data. They don’t correlate with the number of guns sold because a single background check can be associated with multiple weapons. The largest sudden changes are because of changes in firearm policies in June 2019 and will likely see in June 2022 data (not shown).

We can’t disaggregate all data sources for race and ethnicity. But racial/ethnic disparities in mental health indicators remain a top concern. Many other smaller populations are uncounted in our existing datasets, such as LGBTQIA+ or people with disabilities and the interaction between some of these groups and race/ethnicity leaves people invisible. We are also unable to fully disaggregate some of our data due to small numbers, which can provide unreliable estimates or leave individuals at risk of identification. We will continue to collect information to help identify where disparities exist and encourage better data collection.

111 https://healthlaw.org/black-disabled-and-uncounted/
Next steps

We’ve summarized behavioral and mental health status and trends in Pierce County. We must include more indicators as we expand and refine these analyses. These should include climate, housing and economics. Pierce County has recently seen the highest level of inflation since the 1980s, which will affect people’s lives and health. Finally, we need more disaggregation and trends to better see which populations are at risk and the root causes of that risk.

Misinformation can poison conversations about public, mental and behavioral health issues. Organizations and people across public and private institutions of authority should actively manage misinformation. They should present reliable information before misinformation dominates discussions. They should do so on channels where the target population is active. Measured responses to misinformation can help spread reliable information about COVID-19 and other topics such as vaccinations, substance abuse and public health decrees.

In late 2020, Pierce County approved a behavioral health tax to support behavioral health education, early intervention and prevention. These funds will help support our work to manage complex behavioral and developmental needs in youth. We should monitor domains addressed by this funding to ensure we incorporate the effects of the tax in future versions of this report.

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Appendix

More than 900,000 people live in Pierce County, which means we experienced 2020-2021 in more than 900,000 ways. Any effort to provide a comprehensive list of events from that time will inevitably fall short, but we believe it’s important to remember the background against which people faced so many behavioral health challenges. We asked community partners, residents and staff subject matter experts to tell us what affected them most. We used their answers and news reports from that time to create this partial list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>EVENT OR TOPIC</th>
<th>RELATED TO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DECEMBER 2019</td>
<td>Chinese officials confirm a cluster of pneumonia cases around Wuhan, China. They later name the virus SARS-CoV-2 as the causal agent of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).¹¹⁴</td>
<td>COVID-19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NATIONAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANUARY 2020</td>
<td>President Trump impeached for the first time.</td>
<td>COVID-19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>LOCAL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NATIONAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEBRUARY 2020</td>
<td>Gov. Jay Inslee declares state of emergency.¹¹⁸</td>
<td>COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LOCAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NATIONAL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>President Trump acquitted on impeachment charge.¹¹⁹</td>
<td>COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LOCAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NATIONAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First COVID-19 outbreak in a long-term care facility (Kirkland), the first major site of infections in the US.¹²⁰</td>
<td>COVID-19</td>
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<td>More people begin to telework. American Bureau of Labor Statistics later reports the percentage of employed people who teleworked increased from 22% (2019) to 42% (2020).¹²¹</td>
<td>COVID-19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahmaud Arbery murdered while jogging in his neighborhood in Georgia.¹²²</td>
<td>COVID-19</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARCH 2020</td>
<td>Washington limits the number of people at various gatherings and closes nonessential businesses.¹²³</td>
<td>COVID-19</td>
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<td>LOCAL</td>
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</table>

¹¹⁵ https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/president-trump-impeached-house-of-representatives
¹¹⁹ https://www.npr.org/2020/02/05/801429948/not-guilty-trump-acquitted-on-2-articles-of-impeachment-as-historic-trial-closes
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First COVID-19 related death in Pierce County.</td>
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<td>Pierce County K-12 public and private schools close.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Washington issues Stay Home, Stay Healthy order.</td>
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<td>June 2020</td>
<td>Manuel Ellis dies in Tacoma police custody. Death later ruled a homicide by Medical Examiner’s office.</td>
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<td>Washington bans residential evictions as part of state of emergency.</td>
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<td>News outlets report consumers are “panic buying” things like emergency supplies, food and toilet paper.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>President Trump invokes Title 42 to restrict immigration and travel “by reason of the existence of any communicable disease in a foreign country.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CARES Act passed, suspending federal student loan payments through September 2020. Pause extended several times.</td>
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<tr>
<td>APRIL 2020</td>
<td>National unemployment rate hits highest point since 1948 (14.8% nationally) as nonfarm payrolls shed 22.1 million jobs between January and April 2020. Employment declines to 86% of pre-recession levels, with hospitality and leisure industries, and Black, Hispanic and younger workers disproportionally affected.</td>
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125 [https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/tacoma-city-council-manuel-ellis-death-investigation/281-fe6fcffd-ae14-41f8-b5ec-3e349a8be9f7](https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacoma/tacoma-city-council-manuel-ellis-death-investigation/281-fe6fcffd-ae14-41f8-b5ec-3e349a8be9f7)
126 [Eviction Moratorium Bridge](https://Eviction Moratorium Bridge)
131 [Eviction Moratorium Bridge](https://Eviction Moratorium Bridge)
132 [Eviction Moratorium Bridge](https://Eviction Moratorium Bridge)
135 [Labor area summaries](https://esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/labor-area-summaries).
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<tr>
<td>MAY 2020</td>
<td>Federal government begins first round of stimulus checks.</td>
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<td>Payment Protection Program, intended to help small businesses weather the financial effects of the pandemic, runs out of money.</td>
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<td>George Floyd killed in police custody. A witness's video of his death goes viral. Floyd's death reinvigorates national and local civil rights protests.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gov. Inslee ties state reopening plan to county-specific health metrics. Depending on the county's phase, certain activities (or size of activity) are limited.</td>
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<td>JUNE 2020</td>
<td>Escalating racial justice and political reform protests and riots help establish Seattle's Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ), later renamed Capitol Hill Occupied Protest (CHOP).</td>
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<td>Washington's Secretary of Health mandates statewide mask use in many public settings.</td>
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<td>AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2020</td>
<td>Studies estimate up to one-quarter of 2020 high school graduates delayed college because of COVID-19 concerns. A later census survey showed more than 15 million college students canceled fall 2020 college plans because of COVID-19.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER 2020</td>
<td>Wildfire smoke pushes many people indoors.</td>
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<td>OCTOBER 2020</td>
<td>President Trump tests positive for COVID-19, receives Remdesivir.</td>
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</table>


138 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Floyd


143 Department of Health, Order of the Secretary of Health: No. 20-03 Face Coverings-Statewide. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Secretary_of_Health_Order_20-03-Statewide_Face_Coverings.pdf


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<tr>
<td>NOVEMBER 2020</td>
<td>Gov. Inslee modifies the Stay Home, Stay Healthy order, closing gyms, bowling</td>
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<td>alleys and movie theaters. Bars limited to outdoor service. Indoor social</td>
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<td></td>
<td>gatherings require a 14-day quarantine. Outdoor social gatherings limited to</td>
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<td>5 people from outside of household.</td>
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<td>win.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>FDA authorizes first at-home COVID-19 test.</td>
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<td>American Psychological Association Survey indicates 75% of Americans feel</td>
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<td>the 2020 political climate was a significant source of stress in their life.</td>
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<td>About 40% said political divisiveness caused some level of family strife.</td>
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<td>DECEMBER 2020</td>
<td>Pfizer vaccine approved for Emergency Use by FDA.</td>
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<td>COVID-19 vaccination launched in Washington with tiered eligibility schedule.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>First mass vaccination events conducted in Pierce County.</td>
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<td>Tacoma Pierce-County Health Department releases COVID-19 Health Equity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assessment.</td>
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<td>Gov. Inslee issues proclamations updating and expanding restrictions around</td>
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<td>travel, evictions, schooling, religion and gatherings, including gyms and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>indoor dining.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Second round of stimulus checks announced. Check rollout causes anxiety as the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Internal Revenue Service sends checks to some ineligible people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>JANUARY 2021</td>
<td>Patrick Shenaurlt, a Tacoma man experiencing homelessness, fatally shot. One of the men charged was found not guilty in Nov. 2022.</td>
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<td>On Jan. 6, a semi-organized and violent crowd invaded the U.S. Capitol while Congress was in session to certify the November 2020 election.</td>
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<td>President Trump is impeached a second time.</td>
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<td>President Biden is inaugurated.</td>
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<td>Publication and discussion of the rise in Asian-American hate crimes.</td>
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<td>Gov. Inslee signs Healthy Washington–Roadmap to Recovery proclamation. Includes indicators to guide decision-makers through the end of the COVID-19 state of emergency.</td>
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<td>Pierce County Sheriff Ed Troyer calls 911, allegedly reporting that Black newspaper delivery driver Sedrick Altheimer threatened him. Pierce County moves to investigate in April 2021. Sheriff Troyer found not guilty in December 2022. A civil lawsuit continues.</td>
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<td>People 65 and older eligible for COVID-19 vaccination.</td>
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<td>Presidential COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force created to provide recommendations for mitigating and preventing inequities caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.</td>
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<td>Pierce County enters phase 2 of Roadmap to Recovery. Recreational venues allowed to open at 25% capacity.</td>
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169 https://www.thenewstribune.com/article/270360227.html
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International travelers required to have negative test for U.S. entry.</td>
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<td><strong>Tacoma police officer</strong> drives through a crowd, running over pedestrian while responding to reports of street-racing. The Pierce County Prosecutor later announced the officer would not face charges for the incident.</td>
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<td>FEBRUARY 2021</td>
<td>President Trump acquitted on impeachment charges by the U.S. Senate.</td>
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<td>FDA authorizes Johnson &amp; Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.</td>
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<td>Police handcuff and pepper spray 9-year-old Black/African American girl in Rochester, N.Y.</td>
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<td>MARCH 2021</td>
<td>Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department hosts largest mass vaccine clinic at Clover Park Technical College, with almost 1,900 doses administered.</td>
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<td>Pierce County enters phase 3 of reopening. Reduced restrictions on indoor eating and drinking establishments, resumption of indoor and outdoor entertainment. K-12 teachers, childcare, grocery store, agriculture, firefighters, public transit, and law enforcement workers all eligible to receive vaccine. Updated school guidance allows children to be 3 feet apart.</td>
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<td>COVID-19 vaccine breakthrough cases confirmed in Washington. Pierce County faces spikes of food insecurity.</td>
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179 TPCHD Internal Vaccine Clinics Events Calendar
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Container ship blocks Suez Canal, disrupting supply chains. 184</td>
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<td>Third round of stimulus checks announced. 185</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Checks raise fears extra money will be spent on substance and alcohol addictions. 186</td>
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<tr>
<td>APRIL 2021</td>
<td>State updates Roadmap to Recovery metrics. 187</td>
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<td>All residents aged 16+ years eligible for vaccine. 188</td>
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<td>Pierce County hits single-day highest number of vaccine doses administered (9,900). 189</td>
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<td>J&amp;J vaccine distribution resumes after pause over blood clots. 190</td>
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<td>Pierce County moves back to phase 2 of reopening with tightened restrictions on indoor eating and drinking establishments and indoor and outdoor entertainment. 191</td>
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<td>Gov. Inslee orders public schools to offer greater than 30% in-person learning per week. 192</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Derek Chauvin found guilty of murder of George Floyd. 193</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAY 2021</td>
<td>Mask mandate lifted for COVID-19 vaccinated people. Updated guidance increases attendance capacity at spectator and religious events. 194</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pierce County moves to phase 3 of reopening. Restrictions relaxed on indoor eating and drinking establishments and indoor and outdoor entertainment. 195</td>
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189 https://www.tpchd.org/healthy-people/diseases/covid-19/pierce-county-cases
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JUNE 2021</td>
<td>Washington passes police reform laws banning chokeholds, no-knock warrants. De-escalation techniques required.</td>
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<td>Planned statewide reopening of all activities with minimal restrictions.</td>
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<td>COVID-19 Delta variant becomes dominant strain in Washington.</td>
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<td>Governor Inslee issues eviction moratorium through October.</td>
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<td>Record high temperature of 108 degrees at Sea-Tac Airport.</td>
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<td>JULY 2021</td>
<td>Juneteenth becomes a national holiday.</td>
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<td>70% of eligible Washington residents have completed their COVID-19 primary vaccination series.</td>
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<td>Legislation takes effect that restricts police use of force, limits vehicle pursuits and changes conditions by which police have cause to detain or pursue suspects.</td>
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<td>In March 2022, changes are partially rolled back.</td>
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<td>Masks required in schools for children and staff for the new school year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>AUGUST 2021</td>
<td>Washington reissues indoor mask mandate. All employees working in K-12, childcare and higher education institutions must complete primary vaccination series. Most state employees, private healthcare and long-term care workers must complete primary vaccination series.</td>
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198 Delta variant could become dominant strain in U.S. this summer, CDC head says. (June 18, 2021) Retrieved from: Delta variant could become dominant strain in U.S., CDC director says - The Washington Post

199 Inslee announces eviction moratorium “bridge”. (June 24, 2021) Retrieved from: Inslee announces eviction moratorium “bridge” | Governor Jay Inslee (wa.gov)

200 Seattle area could experience longest stretch of 90 degree days on record. (July 24, 2022) Retrieved from: Heat wave to impact western Washington this week | king5.com

201 Juneteenth becomes a federal holiday. (June 17, 2021) Retrieved from: June 17, 2021 Juneteenth becomes a federal holiday (cnn.com)


203 https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1054&initiative=false&Year=2021

204 https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1310&Year=2021&initiative=false


206 Masks required for all K-12 students and staff heading back to the classroom. (July 28, 2021) Retrieved from: Masks required for all K-12 students and staff heading back to the classroom | Washington State Department of Health

207 Gov. Inslee revives indoor mask mandate, orders all school workers to get COVID-19 vaccine. (August 18, 2021) Retrieved from: Gov. Inslee revives indoor mask mandate, orders all school workers to get COVID-19 vaccine | KATU
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<td>FDA lifts EUA for Pfizer vaccine and grants full authorization.</td>
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<td>Pierce County hospitals erect outdoor tents in response to COVID-19 surge.</td>
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<td>Organized protest of Governor Inslee’s mask mandate in Olympia.</td>
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<td>U.S. withdraws from Afghanistan.</td>
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<td>Federal COVID-19 unemployment benefits end.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEPTEMBER 2021</td>
<td>Facial coverings required for outdoor events with 500+ people, regardless of vaccination status.</td>
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<td>50% of Pierce County population completes primary COVID-19 vaccination series.</td>
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<td>CDC recommends a third dose (booster shot) of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for those 65+ and others at severe risk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCTOBER 2021</td>
<td>Proof of vaccination or recent COVID-19 test (within 72 hours) required for outdoor events with 10,000+ people and indoor events with 1,000+ people.</td>
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<td>CDC authorizes Moderna and J&amp;J boosters for people 65 and older and others at severe risk.</td>
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<td>FDA authorizes the Pfizer COVID-vaccine (Comirnaty) for kids aged 5-11 years.</td>
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<td>NACCHO sends letter to U.S. Attorney General requesting protection for public health officials because of violence, threats and harassment.</td>
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</tbody>
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208 FDA GRANTS FULL APPROVAL OF PFIZER COVID-19 VACCINE. (August 26, 2021) Retrieved from: [FDA grants full approval of Pfizer COVID-19 Vaccine](https://naco.org)

209 Tacoma hospitals turning to tents to accommodate COVID surge. (August 31, 2021) Retrieved from: [Tacoma hospitals turning to tents to accommodate COVID surge](https://heraldnet.com)


211 The last US military planes have left Afghanistan, marking the end of the United States’ longest war. (August 31, 2021) Retrieved from: [The last US military planes have left Afghanistan, marking the end of the United States’ longest war](https://cnn.com)

212 Pandemic unemployment benefits end in September and states aren’t extending them. (August 31, 2021) Retrieved from: [Federal unemployment benefits end in a week—states won’t extend them](https://nbcnews.com)


214 CDC advisers sign off on Pfizer booster shot for certain groups. (September 23, 2021) Retrieved from: [CDC advisers sign off on Pfizer booster shot for certain groups](https://nbcnews.com)

215 Proof of vaccination to be required at all large events in Washington starting November 15. (October 14, 2021) Retrieved from: [Proof of vaccination to be required at all large events in Washington starting November 15](https://king5.com)


218 NACCHO Requests Protection of Public Health Department Officials and Staff from Harassment, Intimidation, and Threats of Violence. (October 18, 2021) Retrieved from: [NACCHO Requests Protection of Public Health Department Officials and Staff from Harassment, Intimidation, and Threats of Violence](https://naccho.org)

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<td>COVID-19</td>
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<td>NOVEMBER 2021</td>
<td>School board meetings around the country disrupted by parents and protestors.</td>
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<td>FDA authorizes booster shots for adults 18+</td>
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<td>Washington launches online COVID-19 vaccine verification system (WA Verify).</td>
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<td>Shooting at Tacoma Mall sends Black Friday shoppers fleeing</td>
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<td>CDC updates U.S. entry requirements to mandate a negative test within one or three days of arrival.</td>
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<td>DECEMBER 2021</td>
<td>Omicron becomes the dominant variant of COVID-19 in Washington.</td>
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<td>FDA grants emergency authorization for ages 16-17 to receive Pfizer COVID-19 booster.</td>
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<td>CDC recommends all adults receive mRNA vaccine over Johnson &amp; Johnson vaccine.</td>
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<td>National inflation rises 7% during 2021, the fastest increase in 40 years.</td>
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<td>U.S. Supreme Court hears oral arguments for Mississippi's Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, reconsidering abortion rights.</td>
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<td>Tacoma Police Department internal investigation exonerates two of five officers in the death of Manuel Ellis. The other three are scheduled for trial in 2023.</td>
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