



Science in Support of Local Decision Making for COVID-19:

A DIALOGUE WITH SPOKANE COMMUNITIES

Brief Summary

In November 2021, the Washington State Academy of Sciences hosted the third dialogue in a series on how COVID-19 is affecting local community issues. WSAS worked with community members and organizations to understand issues that were most important to them. Based on the results of these discussions, this virtual event focused on the topic of community growth and health in the context of the ongoing development of the greater Spokane region, which is made up of urban, suburban, and rural communities totaling roughly 575,000 people.

Panelists brought expertise from academia, non-profits, and businesses in the community:

Glen Duncan, *Professor and Chair, Nutrition and Exercise Physiology, Washington State University (moderator, WSAS member)*

Alisha Benson, *CEO, Greater Spokane Incorporated*

Margo Hill, *Associate Professor, Urban and Regional Planning, Eastern Washington University*

Patrick Jones, *Executive Director, Institute of Public Policy & Economic Analysis, Eastern Washington University*

Pablo Monsivais, *Associate Professor, Nutrition and Exercise Physiology, Washington State University*

Robert Stevens, *Community Health Worker, Greater Spokane*

Questions posed in the dialogue came from a preceding engagement process, the panelists' input during planning, and from event registrants prior to and during the dialogue. The questions covered themes such as:

- **How has the pandemic shifted approaches to cross-sector/community collaboration?**
- **What role does housing policy and resources have in building healthy communities?**
- **How can science inform policy that affects the growth and health of communities, such as reducing health disparities?**

- **How can Spokane build a healthier community for members of all incomes? If cost weren't a hurdle, what would the ideal look like?**
- **How can neighborhoods/developments be designed to enhance outdoor activity, exercise, active transportation, multimodal transportation, and other elements of healthy lifestyles?**
- **What tools, programs, infrastructure, or financial resources could help to enhance health as part of pandemic recovery?**
- **What cross-sector and cross-community collaborations can solve problems in this space? How can everyone from local community members to city leaders make a difference?**

Throughout the discussion, panelists fielded questions and built on or responded to each other's statements, often highlighting the interconnectedness of the issues at hand and bringing in the context of broader social issues. The dialogue focused on the complex understanding of what a healthy community is, both during the pandemic and for the region's future. The pressures facing Spokane are shared in many parts of the United States; the city has experienced rapid growth and is now grappling with rising home prices, changing demographics, and strains on public resources. While Spokane shares challenges faced elsewhere, panelists concluded that existing community resources can lead the region to a positive public health future.

As a result of this WSAS-led Community Dialogue, a variety of perspectives were engaged in a thoughtful dialogue about a complex issue. This event, as with the others in this series, sparked conversations, made new connections among panelists, and brought awareness to how science can contribute to dialogue about local solutions across communities.