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# INTRODUCTION

*“When women are fully involved, the benefits can be seen immediately; families are healthier; they are better fed; their income, savings and reinvestment go up. And what is true of families is true of communities, and eventually, of whole countries.”*

– Kofi Annan, Former United Nations Secretary General

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This report is a first step towards a broad understanding of the status of women and girls in the Puget Sound region. First and foremost, it celebrates their progress and success. In their contributions to the economy, accomplishments in education, roles as primary caregivers of children, and positions as civic leaders, women and girls elevate and enhance the world in which we live. More than ever before, women and girls are recognized for the important roles they play: the more they accomplish, the more opportunities open for the next generation. This is indeed cause for celebration.

But this report is also a call to action. Significant challenges remain to ensure equal opportunities for *all* women and girls to contribute and succeed. Throughout the report, we highlight areas where policies and programs are needed so that all women and girls in our region can aspire to lives that are healthy, economically secure, free of violence, and full of opportunity. By investing in programs and policies that help women and girls thrive, we are investing in the well-being of our families, communities, and society as a whole.

## WHAT'S IN THE REPORT?

To begin painting a portrait of the status of women and girls in the Puget Sound region, we researched five critical topics: economic security, education, health and well-being, safety and violence, and leadership and giving. We devote a chapter to each of these topics. Within each chapter we highlight areas where women and girls are excelling and those in need of improvement. We conclude each chapter with a set of program and policy considerations to help women and girls move forward. Our research focuses on four counties in the Puget Sound region—King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Whatcom. Throughout the report, the term “four-county region” refers to these counties. While we recognize that the Puget Sound region extends beyond the four counties, these initial profiles come together as a rich collage of data and insights that will guide future efforts to understand the status of women and girls in the region as a whole.

The well-being of women and girls grows out of a complex web of interconnections among all the topics we investigated.

Wherever possible, we try to highlight these relationships and stress the need for a holistic approach to improve the conditions of women and girls. In general, when women’s and girls’ well-being is threatened in one area, it is also jeopardized in other areas. This is especially true for economic security because opportunities for education and leadership, as well as health and safety, are profoundly affected by social and economic circumstances.

Within each topic area, we also include a section focusing on the status of immigrant and refugee women and girls in the four-county region. They share many of the same experiences as women and girls born in the U.S., and contribute to their communities and families in similar ways. Their experiences, however, are uniquely influenced by their cultural and linguistic differences as well as their immigration and citizenship status. This rapidly growing segment of our population greatly enriches our communities, yet their contributions often go unrecognized and their particular needs are frequently unaddressed. In summarizing the status of women and girls in the region’s immigrant and refugee communities, we provide a baseline of information upon which researchers, policymakers, and community organizations can build.

## DATA AND METHODS

The *A Closer Look* research team used a “mixed methods” approach to paint a portrait of women and girls in the four-county region. From March 2006 through February 2007, we collected and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources.

The quantitative research includes data from national and state databases, such as the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, Washington State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State Population Survey, plus data from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. In addition, we reviewed local reports containing data and analysis from various service agencies working for women and girls in the four-county region, and we incorporated these findings throughout the report.

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To collect the qualitative data, we interviewed 104 service providers, administrators, managers, and staff from organizations working with women and girls, as well as other key stakeholders in the community (*see Appendix B for a list of interviewees*). These “community sources” have a deep knowledge of the major issues facing women and girls and offer perspectives that may not exist in the form of quantitative data. To probe more deeply on topics of particular interest, we also held 10 focus groups with specific groups of women and girls—including immigrant and refugee farm workers, lesbian and bisexual women, low-income women and mothers, older women, younger women, leaders, philanthropists, women of color, and women caring for aging and/or disabled family members.

## LIMITATIONS

The information in this report is meant to provide a “snapshot”—a moment-in-time picture—of several issues critical to the well-being of women and girls in the four-county region. By covering such a breadth of issues, we necessarily sacrifice some of the complexity needed to fully understand those issues. While we would like to explain all the intriguing, complex, and interrelated findings about the region’s women and girls, such in-depth analyses are beyond the scope of this project. However, the report does provide a baseline of data and perspectives for future investigations. Furthermore, while newer data will inevitably replace the data in this report, the story of women and girls in the region is unlikely to change quickly. Thus, this report’s “big picture” will be useful for many years to come and any recommendations stemming from it will remain timely.

While we cover a wide range of topics, the information in this report is by no means exhaustive. To keep it at a manageable size, we made a number of difficult decisions. We based our choices of what information to include and how to present it on many factors. In some cases, data simply were not available or sufficiently reliable to accurately reflect the status of women and girls in the region. Thus, information is sometimes missing on important groups of women and girls, such as lesbian

and bisexual women, transgendered people, women of color, immigrant and refugee women and girls, and those who are differently-abled. When data were not available or reliable at the county level, we supplemented our findings with state and national data, when appropriate.

Finally, the data used in this report are subject to errors inherent in all research studies. The quantitative data use regional samples of women and girls to make estimates describing their well-being across the five areas of interest. Since the data are based on a sample, and not all women and girls, the estimates contain some degree of error. When this error is large and brings the reliability of the estimate into question, we either exclude the estimate entirely or indicate that it should be interpreted with caution. The qualitative data (“community sources” and focus groups) were collected to gain a deeper, more personal understanding of the issues facing certain groups of women and girls and to bring “voice” to the report, rather than produce precise, representative descriptions of all women and girls. Caution should be used when generalizing the experiences and insight of community sources and focus group participants to all women.

Despite their different methods, the quantitative and qualitative approaches show remarkable agreement. Together, we believe this information reflects an accurate, descriptive, and useful snapshot of women and girls in this region.

## A BEGINNING...

This report is only a beginning. We hope it piques the interest of funding organizations, policymakers, community organizations—anyone who is genuinely concerned about the well-being of women and girls in our communities. We hope it stimulates in-depth research, evidence-based program development, and well conceived evaluations of what does and doesn’t work to improve the lives of the daughters, mothers, students, working women, caregivers, civic leaders, and supportive friends who contribute so much to the quality of life in the Puget Sound region.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

To access the more extensive research report, as well as helpful resources about organizations and programs serving women and girls in the four-county region, please visit the Women’s Funding Alliance website at [www.wfalliance.org](http://www.wfalliance.org).

## WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE FOUR-COUNTY REGION: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Over half (54 percent) of females in Washington live in King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties – a total of over 1.7 million women and girls.<sup>1</sup> Their diversity in race, ethnicity, country of origin, and age enriches our communities, and is important to remember when considering their overall well-being.

The four-county region is becoming increasingly diverse. Over the next 25 years, both nationally and locally, population growth among females of color will continue to outpace growth in the white female population. In Washington, this is especially true for Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic females, whose populations, by 2030, are expected to grow by 61 and 69 percent, respectively (Chart 1). The population of multiracial females is also expected to increase substantially (75 percent).

In King County, 29 percent of females are women and girls of color, followed by Pierce (26 percent), Snohomish (18 percent), and Whatcom (15 percent) counties (Table 1).

**RACE/ETHNICITY OF FEMALES  
FOUR-COUNTY REGION 2006**

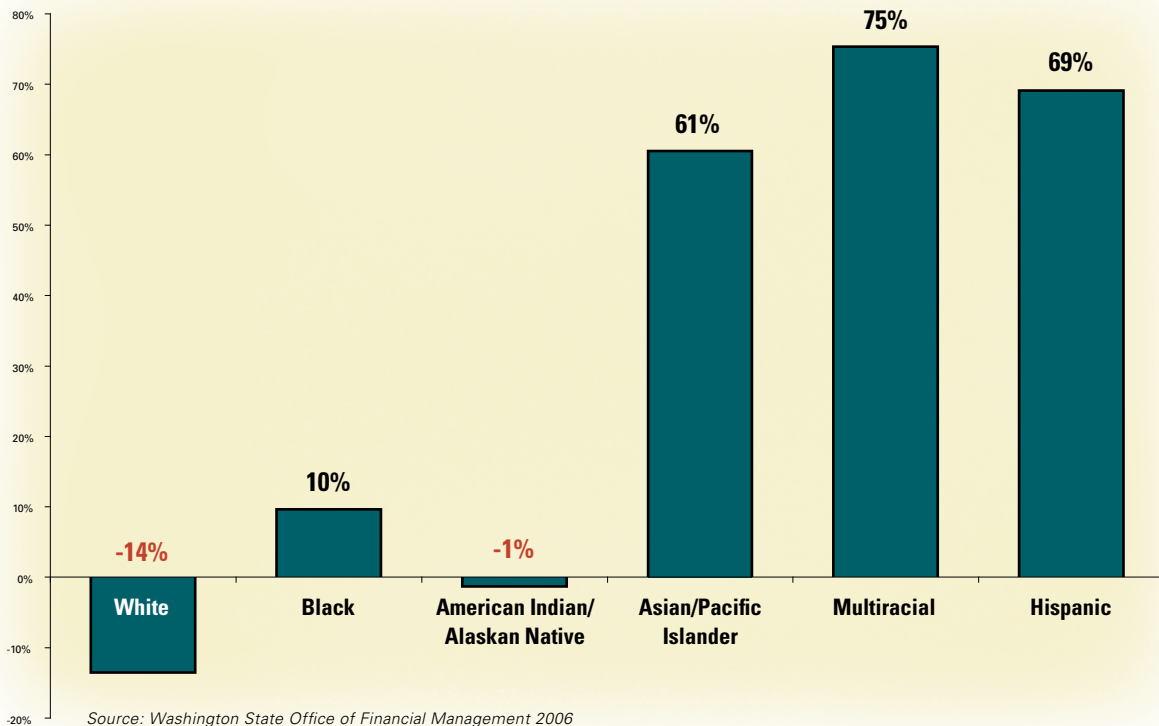
**TABLE 1**

	County			
	King %	Pierce %	Snohomish %	Whatcom %
<b>Non-Hispanic</b>				
White	71	74	82	85
Black	6	7	1	<1
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	1	1	1	3
Asian/Pacific Islander	14	8	8	4
Multiracial	3	4	3	2
<b>Hispanic</b>	6	6	5	6

*Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management 2006  
Note: Percents may not add to 100% due to rounding.*

**CHART 1**

**PERCENT CHANGE IN FEMALE POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY  
WASHINGTON STATE 2000-2030**



Changes in the racial/ethnic makeup of Washington females are due in part to rapid growth in the population of immigrant and refugee women and girls. Estimates suggest that more than 400,000 foreign-born females live in Washington State.<sup>2</sup> Three-quarters (76 percent) of them are naturalized citizens of the U.S. These numbers do not include the sizable population of undocumented women and girls, although, in the U.S. overall, the majority of the undocumented population (58 percent) are male.<sup>3</sup> Most female immigrants in the four-county region are from Asia, Europe, and Latin America (primarily Mexico) (Table 2).<sup>4</sup>

In addition to its diverse immigrant population, Washington hosts the sixth largest number of refugees in the U.S. In 2004 alone, Washington hosted more than 3,000 refugees. The majority of refugees living in Washington are from the former Soviet Union (71 percent), followed by Somalia (7 percent), Yugoslavia (6 percent), Vietnam (3 percent), Iran (3 percent), Sudan (3 percent), Ethiopia (2 percent), and all other areas (5 percent).<sup>5</sup>

The age structure of our population is also changing. In the four-county region today, approximately one in eight women is over the age of 65. By 2030, as the baby-boom generation ages, that number is expected to increase to one in five.<sup>6</sup>

Why do these changes matter? The increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the population will boost the need for culturally and linguistically competent policies and programs to serve women

**PERCENT OF FEMALE FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION BY REGION OF ORIGIN FOUR-COUNTY REGION 2005**

**TABLE 2**

	County			
	King %	Pierce %	Snohomish %	Whatcom %
Europe	19	28	20	27
Asia	53	49	45	22
Mexico	11	11	15	10
Other Latin America	5	5	3	5
Other Areas	12	8	14	36

*Source: American Community Survey 2005*

and girls in areas critical to their well-being, especially health care, education, and social services. The aging of the population will give rise to similar challenges: over the next 25 years, prioritizing the needs of women 65 and older will become increasingly important as these women move into retirement and rely on publicly funded programs such as Medicare and Social Security. Failure to prepare for these demographic changes could have significant negative impacts on the nation as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Recognizing the policy implications of such transitions and planning for them now can greatly improve the prospects for women and girls in our region.

*[Women have} an ability to bring people together and get people to work together. This has something to do with an attunement with collaborative, cooperative relationships.*

– Community Source