

Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

April 2003

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them through programs and services, funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.



Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger is a monthly publication of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)

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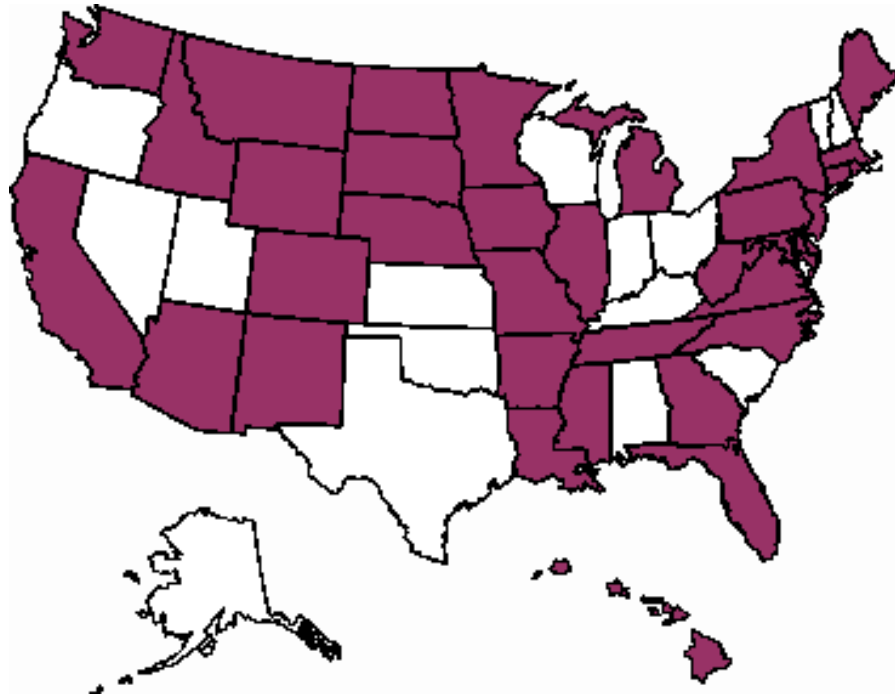
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States (35 plus the District of Columbia) that currently have legislation similar to Alaska's HB 25, which seeks to simplify and centralize resources for making end-of-life decisions. (Source: Aging with Dignity.)

Legislation Seeks to Simplify Process for End-of-Life Decisions

Legislation currently being considered in the Alaska House of Representatives would simplify the process of arranging end-of-life issues for Alaskans. HB 25: Health Care Services Directives would bring together current Alaska laws regarding living wills, advanced health care directives, do not resuscitate decisions, tissue and organ donation, and even the care of those whose bodies are unclaimed by relatives. Juneau Representative Bruce Weyrauch sponsored the bill. Kodiak Representative Dan Ogg has signed on as cosponsor.

More Alaskans and other Americans are beginning to think proactively about the end of life, and are taking steps to ensure that important issues are arranged while there is time to think carefully and dispassionately about what is desired and needed. HB 25, if passed, would help simplify this process, making it easier and therefore more likely that we will make these arrangements before they become complicated by urgency, emotion or inability.

Currently, 35 states and the District of Columbia have passed similar legislation, based on what is called the "Five Wishes," so called because it helps people clarify five issues that
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HB 25 (continued)

affect the end of life:

1. Who you want to make health care decisions for you when you can't make them.
2. The kind of medical treatment you want or don't want.
3. How comfortable you want to be.
4. How you want people to treat you.
5. What you want your loved ones to know.

This legislation does not dictate what happens at the end of our lives. Instead it has the opposite effect of ensuring that we can each clearly outline what we would like to happen. It does not lock anyone into treatment they do not wish to receive. The directives are strictly voluntary, and being designed by the person they affect, will be as comprehensive or as general as the person chooses.

Like many of Alaska's senior advocacy agencies, the Alaska Commission on Aging supports passage of HB 25. As outlined in their Resolution 2003-04, the Commission feels passage of the bill will assist Alaskans to thoughtfully state their intent regarding the kind of medical, personal, emotional, and spiritual care they wish to receive in the last stages of their lives if they are no longer able to express their wishes, and will provide a clear and helpful format to guide an individual in defining their wishes in this regard, and sharing that information with their loved ones. The full text of the resolution, and others being considered or passed by the Commission, are available on the Commission Website at www.alaskaaging.org/legislative/resolutions.html.

At the time of publication, HB 25 was under consideration by the House Rules Committee. If you have an opinion on this or any legislation, please contact your Representatives and let your feelings be known. The Alaska Legislature home page, w3.legis.state.ak.us/home.htm provides contact information.

Experience Works Searches for Alaska's Most Outstanding Older Worker

Experience Works, the country's largest provider of mature-worker training and employment, has launched its annual search for Alaska's outstanding older worker. Alaska is currently soliciting nominations from businesses and individuals. Applicants must be 65 years of age or older, currently employed, and working a minimum of 20 hours a week in paid employment. The winner must be willing and able to travel to Washington, D.C. in September for the Prime Time Awards Program events. Applicants who are part of a subsidized employment program funded through local, state or national government support programs are not eligible for this award, including participants in the Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training program (MASST).

To access a nomination form, go to the Experience Works Web site at www.experienceworks.org. To receive a nomination form by mail, send a post card or note to:

Prime Time Awards

c/o Jeff Kemp, Associate Coordinator

Alaska Commission on Aging

P.O. Box 110209

Juneau, Alaska 99811

You may also call (907) 465-4872. Workers may enter themselves or be nominated by an employer, family, or friends. The deadline for nominations is June 2, 2003.

Alaska's 2002 outstanding older worker was Jim Tyner, 74, an office manager at Capital Service, Inc. from Douglas. Previous winners include Lillian Ference, 80, bookstore owner from Ketchikan, Margaret Sanders, 74, the director of a senior center from Nenana, and Norman H.V. Elliott, 80, a minister from Anchorage.

Public Hearing on the Disability Policy Summit

The second Disability Policy Summit will be held April 22 in Juneau to acquaint the new administration and legislature with the issues affecting the lives of Alaskans with disabilities, discuss proposed solutions and secure commitment to work together on specific solutions.

Summit sponsors include the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, State Independent Living Council, Governor's Committee on Employment and Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities, Alaska Mental Health Board, and Alaska Commission on Aging. The sponsors would like to have input from the disability community on the issues and proposed solutions regarding:

- Have we captured the major issues?
- Are we on track with the proposed solutions?
- What changes do you recommend?

Disability Policy Summit documents can be downloaded from the Internet at the following address: www.hss.state.ak.us/gcdse/whatsnew.htm

To participate in the meeting, request reasonable accommodations, an agenda or to make written public comments, please contact:

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Medicare Trustees Paint Bleak Picture of Program's Future

The Medicare trustees recently delivered their annual reports on the fiscal health of Medicare, finding that the financial outlook has declined from last year's estimate, due to lower-than-expected revenues and higher-than-expected hospital spending in 2002.

Medicare's Hospital Insurance (HI) Trust Fund is projected to be exhausted in 2026, four years earlier than estimated in last year's report. HI taxable payroll in 2002 was about 4 percent lower than previously estimated. At the same time, hospital expenditures increased about 2 percent more than estimated, primarily as a result of higher inpatient hospital admissions and a faster increase in the average complexity of these admissions.

The report also projects rapidly increasing costs in the Supplementary Medical Insurance (SMI) Trust Fund, which covers physician visits and other outpatient services. These increases point to higher future federal funding, beneficiary premiums and beneficiary co-pays in Medicare's Part B program, the trustees said.

The trustees called for changes to address long-term fiscal problems facing Medicare. In addition, the trustees again issued a combined report covering both parts of the Medicare program, in order to present a more comprehensive picture of the financing challenges ahead.

Alaska's SCSEP Program Changes Its Name

The Alaska Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) has changed its name to better reflect the intent of the federally funded employment/training program. The new name of the program in Alaska is *Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training*, or MASST. Still known nationally as SCSEP, federal program administrators encourage state programs to be innovative with the name and the administration of the program.

Changes to the MASST program, which provides wages and part-time training opportunities for low-income seniors, are occurring as the program becomes more aligned with federal regulations. One major change for fiscal year 2004 is the elimination of essential positions previously allowed at host agencies. According to federal regulations, MASST slots must be in addition to positions that would normally be budgeted by the host agency. Other changes include making it mandatory for enrollees to perform job searches on a regular basis, which encourages enrollees to visit their nearest Alaska Job Center, or to inquire about positions with local businesses if no Job Center is available in the enrollee's community.

Alaska has not been placing enrollees in as many unsubsidized positions as the U.S. Department of Labor would like. According to Alaska's SCSEP federal representative Robert Lunz, Alaska is in line to receive technical assistance to help identify problem areas with the administration of the program and to help bolster unsubsidized placements. Lunz also mentioned that the long awaited federal regulations, which were due out last year, may be in force as soon as July or August.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) for fiscal year 2004 was released on March 10, 2003 for host agencies across Alaska interested in the MASST program. Proposals will not be accepted from areas where the program has sub-grantees—Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Southeast Alaska—as these areas are slated to continue with their established programs. Federal funding is expected to be less than last year but the exact amount of Alaska's grant will not be known until late May or June. The RFP is available from the SCSEP page of the Commission's Website, www.AlaskaAging.org. If you have questions on the MASST program, please call Jeff Kemp, Associate Coordinator, at (907) 465-4872.

Senior Advocacy Coalition Monthly Teleconferences

The Senior Advocacy Coalition meets by teleconference from 9:30 to 11:30 AM on the second Friday of every month to address issues affecting Alaska's seniors. The teleconference originates at the Anchorage Senior Center.

For more information on joining a meeting, contact Sue Samet, 261-4140, Lila Berry, 261-4848, or Brenda Brown, 338-6492 in Anchorage; Fred Lau, 235-7655 in Homer; or Lisa Morley, 465-4798 in Juneau.



You can read *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger* on line at www.AlaskaAging.org. **To receive email notification when a new issue is on line, contact:**

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