

Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

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**

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Linda Gohl, the new Executive Director of the Alaska Commission on Aging. (DSDS Staff Photo.)

Linda Gohl Named Executive Director of ACoA

The Alaska Commission on Aging selected Linda Gohl as their new executive director during their February 2004 meeting held in Juneau. Governor Murkowski approved the Commission's selection, and Linda began working for the Commission on April 16, 2004.

For the past two years Ms. Gohl managed the Nutrition, Transportation and Support Services grant program as the Associate Coordinator. Ms. Gohl has worked closely with senior service providers throughout Alaska, and with the Commission assisting with the statewide planning process and recommendations for funding grants for senior services programs.

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DSDS Seeks to Create Cost Methodology and Rate Structure for Reimbursable Waiver Services

Senior and Disabilities Services (DSDS) is in the process of creating a new cost methodology for determining fair cost ranges for units of service. When in place, these will set parameters for how much the state will pay grantee providers to for each type of state-funded service they offer to Alaskans in need.

A December 2003 report to DSDS regarding the integration of senior and disability services, developed by the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, the Alaska Commission on Aging, and the State Independent Living Council, noted the following issues and concerns:

- A need to decrease the disparity between waived services
- A need to work more closely with stakeholders to develop and implement a system of using both grant and waiver funds to apply across all populations
- Institute a soft cap for different services
- Conduct audits of provider agency management costs
- Develop cost containment measures

DSDS released a request for proposals to find an organization to address these issues and concerns, but there were no responses. As a result, DSDS has appointed an interdisciplinary team of experienced staff from within the Department of Health and Social Services to research, facilitate, promote development and implementation of cost containment measures by:

- Requesting from provider organizations, through Alaska Mental Health and Governor's Council leadership, the appointment of three provider representatives who would work directly with the state in the development of cost containment measures (and methodology)
- Organize and conduct orientation and public/provider gatherings around the state soliciting feedback and involvement regarding the consideration of specific elements in the development of cost containment methodologies
- Develop a link on the existing DSDS Web site regarding the development of cost containment measures providing minutes from meetings and progress development notes for public view and comment
- Field test the cost containment methodologies
- Develop language as necessary to incorporate into existing regulations for implementation of cost containment
- Develop user notebooks and tools as necessary to inform and educate providers and stakeholders on how to apply the formulas to services and requests for reimbursements

It is clear that these changes are necessary if funding is to continue in the current economic environment. This taskforce is an opportunity to work collectively with a broad group of providers to improve the system before improvements are mandated. It's a simple case of those of us who use, support, and oversee the system can change it ourselves, or have it changed for us.

DSDS Deputy Director Rod Moline chairs the team, which includes DSDS staff David Maltman, Pat Sidmore, Barb Knapp, Kristie Swanson, and Kevin Perron. Also from the state are Jon Sherwood and Randy Super of the Office of Program Review. The provider representatives are David Morgan of South Central Foundation, Anchorage, Pat

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Advice On the New Medicare Discount Cards: Choose with Care!

If you are an Alaskan senior, if you haven't already, you'll soon see flyers advertising offers for discount drug cards as a result of the Medicare reform measures that take effect in June. Consumer protection experts advise you to study all options very carefully before you select one of these cards.

While many of the discount cards will be issued by legitimate businesses, the scam artists are already gearing up to take advantage of seniors. So far, more than 100 firms have applied to distribute cards.

An estimated 14 million seniors nationwide who do not have insurance are eligible for the drug discount cards. People already enrolled in Medicare health maintenance organizations can sign up for a separate discount card only if their Health Maintenance Organization does not offer one.

Each person is allowed only one card, so choosing will be difficult. While you will be tied to the card you choose, the companies issuing the cards may change their drug list and the discount amounts as often as every seven days.

Before choosing a discount card, do your homework:

- Check with your pharmacist! Many pharmacies offer discounts to seniors who do not have insurance. You may be able to pay reduced prices without paying the card fee. It never hurts to ask first.
- Make sure the card you choose is Medicare approved.
- Look for cards issued by organizations whose names you know or at least recognize.
- Look for the best deals on the medications you use, but be aware that the drug list and discounts may change.
- Beware of offers of deep discounts, as they can decrease after you've signed up for the card.

For more information on the discount cards and other aspects of the Medicare changes, pick up AARP's new consumer education booklet, *Medicare Changes That Could Affect You*. This booklet is available from the Alaska AARP office in Anchorage, (907) 762-3314.

Cost Methodology Team (continued from page 2.)

Branson of Senior Citizens of Kodiak, Rick Miller of Ready Care in Anchorage, and Lynn Wegener of Providence Hospital, Anchorage.

The group had their first meeting earlier this month. You can keep informed on the progress of the team's work by visiting the "Cost Methodology Team" link on the right side of the Senior and Disabilities Services Web page, www.hss.state.ak.us/dsds. The site includes contact information for the team members, agendas of upcoming meetings and notes of past meetings, a flow chart of the team's process, and a bibliography of sources the team is consulting in making its decisions.

