

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

February 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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The Alaska State Capitol Building in Juneau

Legislature Back in Session

The 23rd Alaska State Legislature convened in Juneau on Tuesday, January 21. As it does each session, the Alaska Commission on Aging is working with other advocates to educate the public and our elected representatives on the needs and concerns we all face as we age.

This issue of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger* focuses on the legislation that has been introduced so far this session that is of particular interest to seniors, and provides information on how to stay informed on these issues as the session progresses.

The following are issues addressed in the session's first ACoA Legislative Teleconference and information on the bills related to them:

Procurement of Small Group Health Insurance: At this writing, three bills, HB 10, SB 19 and SB 28, all titled *Group Health Insurance for Private Groups*, are being considered. The Commission supports legislation that would allow small businesses (defined in the legislation as 2-50 members) to buy into a non-catastrophic benefits system at a reduced rate. This will greatly improve conditions for those serving Alaskan seniors and those with disabilities in small adult daycare centers and similar settings.

Restricting Unwanted Telephone Calls: As we age we often become increasingly vulnerable to telemarketers and other phone solicitations. HB 8: *Telemarketers Phone*

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Senior-Related Legislation (continued from page 1)

Lists/Registration and HB 15: *Telemarketers No-Call Lists* both seek to establish a database of residential telephone customers who do not wish to receive telephonic solicitations. This would be compiled at no cost to customers. Telemarketers would be required to purchase the database. They would also be required to identify themselves as telemarketers. Telephone solicitors who are currently exempt from registering as such would be required to do so. HB 12: *Harassment by Electronic Communication* would broaden prosecution for harassment such as obscene phone calls to include harassment via electronic means such as email.

At the January 28 Legislative Teleconference, Commissioners passed Resolution 2003-01 in support of HB 8 and HB 15.

Adult Day Services Facility Licensing: SB 37: *Adult Day Services Facilities* seeks to provide the legal framework for an adult day facilities licensing program. Currently no state regulation on adult day services facilities exists. The Commission feels that vulnerable adults should have the same protections afforded other vulnerable populations such as children. This would include background checks for key workers in adult day care facilities.

Continuation of Medicaid Eligibility for Breast and Cervical Cancer: HB 21 and SB 17: *Medicaid for Breast and Cervical Cancer* seek to continue to fund treatment for Alaskans diagnosed with breast and cervical cancer through a screening program supported through federal assistance from Medicaid. Such screening significantly improves the chances of survival for Alaskan women identified with these cancers who qualify for treatment assistance. Timely identification and treatment of breast and cervical cancer offers increased longevity to those affected by these diseases. If found and treated early enough, these cancers can often be cured. Nationally over 75% of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer are age 50 or older. This coverage is current law, but has a sunset provision that would end it in 2003. Both bills seek to extend the coverage beyond the sunset date.

Healthcare Directives: HB 25: *Health Care Services Directives* would accomplish the following:

- 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.
- 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.
- Draw upon the experience of thirty-six other states that have adopted this format, nationally referred to as “The Five Wishes.”

Ending Insurance Practice Called “Credit Scoring”: HB 5, HB 47, and SB 13, all entitled: *Insurance Discrimination by Credit Rating* seek to eliminate credit scoring for setting insurance rates. Currently, many insurance providers use this formula to set insurance rates for individuals. Apparently, the better one’s credit history, the lower one’s rate. However, many people, particularly seniors, prefer not to accrue debt. While this is sound personal financial planning, it prevents one from developing a credit history. As a result, people without adequate credit histories may be required to pay higher premiums for auto insurance than those who have had DUI convictions!

The Commission also supports the following appropriations bills:

HB 76 and SB 36: *Appropriations: Mental Health Budget*

SB 15: *Appropriations: Sterling Senior Housing Project*

Teleconferences Focus on Aging Issues

You can join other Alaskans who are concerned with and advocate for senior issues through regularly scheduled teleconferences. These include the Senior Advocacy Coalition's monthly teleconferences (see box below) and the Alaska Commission on Aging Legislative Teleconference.

ACoA's Legislative Teleconferences are every other Tuesday. Teleconferences began Tuesday, January 28, 2002 and continue every other Tuesday: February 11 and 25; March 11 and 25; April 8 and 22. Beginning April 22 the meetings will be held every Tuesday until the end of the Legislative session. The time is 9:30 to 11:00 AM.

Public sites participating in the ACoA Legislative Teleconferences include:

Anchorage **AnchorAGE Senior Center** 1300 East 19th Avenue (907) 258-7823
Bethel **Bethel Senior Center** 127 Atsaq Street (907) 543-3988
Cordova **Cordova Community Medical Center** 602 Chase Avenue (907) 424-8288
Dillingham **Bristol Bay Native Association** 1500 Kakanak Road (907) 842-4139
Fairbanks **North Star Council on Aging** 1424 Moore Street (907) 452-1735
Fort Yukon **Native Village of Fort Yukon** Alder Street (907) 662-2581
Homer **Homer Senior Citizens Inc.** 3935 Svedlund (907) 235-6973
Juneau **Alaska Commission on Aging** 333 West Willoughby, Room 757 (907) 465-3250
Juneau **National Senior Services Corps** 9109 Mendenhall Mall Road #5 (907) 790-3613
Ketchikan **Ketchikan Pioneers' Home** 141 Bryant Street (907) 225-4111
Kodiak **Kodiak Senior Center** 302 Erskine Avenue (907) 486-6181
Ninilchik **Ninilchik Senior Citizens, Inc.** 66265 Aspen Street (907) 567-3988
Palmer **Palmer Senior Citizens Center** 831 South Chugach (907) 745-5454
Seldovia **Seldovia Village Tribe** (907) 234-7898
Seward **Seward Senior Center** 336 3rd Street (907) 224-5604
Sitka **Center for Community** 700 Katlian, Suite B (907) 747-6960
Soldotna **Soldotna Senior Center** 197 West Park Avenue (907) 262-2322
Sterling **Sterling Area Senior Citizens** 34453 Sterling Highway (907) 262-6808
Wasilla **Wasilla Senior Center** 1301 Century Circle (907) 376-3104

Anyone requiring assistance or information or special devices and equipment to participate in the meetings must contact Lillian Bradley at (907) 465-3250 (Fax: (907) 465-1398) no later than the Thursday before each teleconference to make necessary arrangements. Agendas are available after 3:00 PM on the day prior to the scheduled teleconference at the ACoA Website, www.AlaskaAging.org. Click the "Legislative Teleconference" button on the left side of the screen.

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.

