

Alaskan Seniors 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**

is a monthly publication of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA). It is produced by Mark Zeiger, Publications Specialist II, Senior and Disabilities Services.

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Joel Gilbertson, Commissioner of Health and Social Services, visits with Ketchikan seniors at Governor Murkowski's announcement of the SeniorCare program. (Photo courtesy of *Ketchikan Daily News*.)

Governor Announces New Program for Seniors

On December 17th, Governor Murkowski announced a new senior initiative called SeniorCare. SeniorCare will provide Alaska's seniors help with prescription drugs, access to healthcare, and information about senior benefits, resources and referrals.

SeniorCare will create a bridge for those seniors most in need of assistance until the full Medicare prescription drug benefit begins in January 2006. Governor Murkowski will ask legislators to pass this legislation so that this benefit can begin in April 2004. The Senior Assistance Program cash benefit was only budgeted in the current fiscal year and would end June 30 if the legislature takes no action, but will continue as an option until January 2006 if passed.

SeniorCare will primarily help low income seniors who do not otherwise qualify for public assistance—the people with greatest needs—but will provide a broader program that will help all seniors.

Seniors who qualify for the Senior Assistance Program (65 and older and 135 percent of the poverty level), and who are not receiving comprehensive Medicaid prescription drug coverage will be provided a choice between the new SeniorCare prescription drug subsidy

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Legislative Teleconferences Return

The Alaska Commission on Aging holds teleconferences during each Legislative session to connect senior advocates around the state and discuss on-going legislation that is of particular interest to seniors. The Legislative Teleconferences for the second session of the 23rd Legislature began Tuesday, January 20. They will continue every other Tuesday until May, when they will become weekly until the end of the session.

Specifically, the teleconference dates include: February 3 and 17, March 2, 16 and 30, April 13 and 27, and May 4 and 11, continuing weekly if the session runs long. The teleconferences run from 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM.

Teleconferences can be heard at sites around the state. Those who participate in the teleconferences from Juneau should note that the Alaska Commission on Aging offices have moved. This year, the Juneau teleconference site will be 150 Third Street #103 (across from Key Bank, off of Main Street downtown). The complete list of sites is as follows:

Anchorage	AnchorAGE Senior Center 1300 East 19th Avenue (907) 258-7823 Older Alaskans Program 401 West International Airport Road #19 (907) 349-0613
Aniak	Kuskokwim Native Assoc., KNA Offices Boundary Avenue (907) 675-4758
Bethel	City of Bethel, Eddie Hoffman 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 Ft. Yukon Alder Street (907) 662-2581
Homer	Homer Senior Citizens Inc. 3935 Svedlund (907) 235-7655
Juneau	Alaska Commission on Aging 150 Third Street #103 (907) 465-3250
Kenai	Central Peninsula Counseling Services 905 Cook Avenue #B (907) 283-1638
Ketchikan	Ketchikan Pioneers' Home 141 Bryant Street (907) 225-4111
Kodiak	Kodiak Senior Center 302 Erskine Avenue (907) 486-6181
Kotzebue	Maniilaq Association (Senior Center) 607 Wolverine Drive (907) 442-7917
Nenana	Nenana Tortella Council on Aging 114 East 3rd Street (907) 832-5818
North Slope	Senior Center 5452 North Star Street, Barrow (907) 852-0276
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

Note that you must go to these centers to hear the teleconference. Phone numbers are included for you to use if you need more information, you cannot participate in the teleconference by calling the numbers.

Anyone requiring assistance, information or special devices and equipment to participate in the meetings must contact Lillan Bradley at 907-465-3250 (Fax: 907-465-1398) or Email: Lillan_Bradley@health.state.ak.us no later than the Thursday before each teleconference to make necessary arrangements. Agendas are available the day prior to the scheduled teleconferences at the above numbers or by calling: 907-269-3666 in Anchorage. They can also be downloaded the day of the teleconference from the ACoA Website: www.AlaskaAging.org, by clicking on the "Legislative Teleconferences" link on the left hand side.

Commission Sets Legislative Priorities for Session

The Commission has begun its Legislative Teleconferences, and have identified a list of bills that they will be monitoring this session.

Commissioners are drafting resolutions in support of **HB 374 and SB 259: SeniorCare** (see page 1).

HB 394 and SB 263: Extend the Alaska Commission on Aging. By statute, the Commission sunsets every four years, unless the Legislature extends it. The Commission is set to sunset June 30, 2004. These two bills call for the Commission to be extended to June 30, 2008. At the time of publication HB 394 is in the House Health, Education and Social Services Committee, and SB 263 is being heard in the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee. Letters of support for the Alaska Commission on Aging and its work from seniors and those who advocate for them in Alaska would be very helpful toward urging the Legislature to continue the Commission for another four years.

Other new legislation the Commission is watching includes:

HB 352 and SB 251 Appropriations: Longevity Bonus would appropriate funds to extend longevity bonus payments through June 30, 2005.

HB 377 and SB 258: Appropriations: Mental Health Budget. These include funding for senior-related programs including the Alaska Veterans' and Pioneers' Homes. These bills are before their respective Finance Committees at the time of publication.

HB 345: Campsite Fees: Disabled Veterans/Seniors, currently before the House Resources Committee.

Bills carried over from the last session include:

HB 10 and SB 28: Group Health Insurance for Private Groups. HB 10 passed the House last session, and is currently in the Senate Finance Committee. SB 28 is currently in the Senate State Affairs Committee.

HB 125: Assisted Living Homes, currently in the House Health, Education and Social Services Committee.

HB 153: Medicaid Cost Containment and Priority List, currently in the House Rules Committee.

HB 172: Medicaid: Children/Pregnant Women/Facility, currently in the House Rules Committee.

HB 180 and SB 135: Veterans Appreciation Day, currently before the House Military and Veterans Affairs Committee and the Senate State Affairs Committees, respectively.

HB 181 and SB 133: State Veterans' Home, currently before the House Military and Veterans Affairs Committee and the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committees, respectively.

HB 182 and SB 134: Appropriations: State Veterans' Home, currently before the House Military and Veterans Affairs Committee and the Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committees, respectively.

HB 25: Health Care Services Directives. HB 25 passed the House last session, and is currently in the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Committee.

HB 328: Senior Prescription Drug Discount Plan, currently in the House Labor and Commerce Committee.

HB 51: Labeling of Prescription Drugs, currently in the Senate Rules Committee.

SB 37: Adult Day Services Facilities, currently in the Senate State Affairs Committee.

SB 201: Home and Respite Care: Criminal Records, currently in the Senate Health, Education and Social Services Committee.

The current status of these bills is listed on the Commission's Legislative Bill Tracker, which can be reached through the Legislative Teleconference page on the Commission Web site, www.AlaskaAging.org. For information on the Commission teleconferences, see page 2 of this issue.

