

# Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

January 2002

*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 front steps of the Alaska State Capitol Building, Juneau, Alaska.

## Advocating for Alaska's Seniors in the New Legislative Session

The second session of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Legislature of the State of Alaska began its first session January 14. Now is the time for advocates of senior issues to educate policy makers on legislative issues affecting all of us as we age.

The Alaska Commission on Aging will be focusing on a variety of senior issues, including legislation left over from the last session.

During the current session, the Commission will join other advocates for Alaskan seniors to sustain the following initiatives:

- Education and advocacy to
- Fill the gap in Alaska's Medicaid long-term care waiver policy that now excludes providing services to Alaskans requiring long-term care due primarily to a cognitive impairment such as Alzheimer's disease

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## Advocating for Alaska's Seniors in the New Legislative Session (continued)

- Achieve legislation that helps moderate income Alaskans make up the difference when they are unable to fully pay the high costs of long-term care
- Create an expanded multi-year legislative focus on long-term care policy issues and supports vital to the well being of Alaskan families as all of us live longer
- Finalizing new regulations for assisted living
- Finalizing new regulations for two approaches to Personal Care Assistance:
  - a consumer directed program in which clients, after receiving training, direct their own personal care services, with the assistance of an 'employment agency' that handles the paperwork associated with the employment and payment of personal care attendants;
  - an agency based program in which agencies provide continuing supervision and administrative oversight for personal care attendants in their employment; the client contracts with the agency for the services to be provided.
- Workforce development: health care and related professions represent one of Alaska's more robust growth areas. The need for Alaskans in this very large occupational area exceeds the available workforce

### **Unfinished Business**

Some senior-related legislation from last session will be pursued in the current session. These include the following:

- HB 197 – Amends Alaska's advance directives laws to incorporate an easy to understand framework for individuals to use in specifying details on the end-of-life-care they wish to receive. This format, known as "The Five Wishes," is used in thirty-five states. See [www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.html](http://www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.html)
- Increased alcohol excise tax to generate increased state revenue to help pay for the social costs of alcohol dependency and abuse
- HB 88/SB55 – Adds "Veterans" to the name of the Alaska Pioneers' Homes, and provides a framework for more explicitly addressing care for older veterans in the Pioneers' Homes; opens the door for the Homes to participate in a pilot project through which Veterans funding could assist individual veterans in paying for the cost of their long-term care in the Homes
- HB 124, also HB 107/SB 67 – Nursing homes/assisted living homes employees – defines requirements for criminal background checks, and prohibits employment of individuals with certain criminal backgrounds
- HB 162 – Expands the number of days that Longevity Bonus recipients can remain out of state while continuing to receive their Longevity Bonus payments
- SB 190 – Strengthens Alaska's guardianship provisions

As new legislation of interest to Alaskan seniors is introduced, it will be tracked by the Commission, and will be discussed in the Commission's Legislative Teleconferences (see schedule on page 4).

## **Complementary and Alternative Medicine and Aging (continued)**

*Alaska Commission on Aging Director, Dr. Lyn Freeman, presented Complementary and Alternative Medicine Research and the Aging Population at the Alaska Health Summit 2001 in Anchorage at the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel December 3-5, 2001. This abstract of Dr. Freeman's presentation is continued from last month's issue of Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger, and will follow in future issues as space allows.*

### **A Brief Description of Some Alternative Therapies (continued)**

#### **Biofeedback**

Biofeedback is a training technique in which people are taught to improve their health and performance by using signals from their own bodies. It is scientifically based and validated by studies and clinical practice. Biofeedback involves immediate monitoring of skin temperature, muscle tension, brain wave activity and skin conductance. Biofeedback can be used to relieve tension headache and low back pain, jaw pain, neuromuscular dysfunction and paralysis, and incontinence.

#### **Massage**

Besides pain relief, massage can also benefit a person's mental health. Massage is used to treat depression and anxiety in children, with better results than relaxation practice. Studies on working adults showed massage reduces anxiety and depression, and also improves cognitive functioning on math tests. Massage is even used to treat pain from burns, cancer and childbirth.

#### **Hypnosis**

Hypnosis is a social interaction in which one person responds to suggestions given by another person (the hypnotist) for imaginative experiences involving changes in perception, memory, and the voluntary control of action or pain. Hypnosis can be affective in treating obesity, insomnia, and anxiety, reducing recovery time after surgery, and can help one quit smoking.

#### **Meditation**

Meditation has been described as settling down a person's awareness to a state of restful alertness. This allows the body to relax deeply and the mind to transcend normal mental activity (thus the term "transcendental meditation"). A number of scientific studies, notably Orme-Johnson D. *Medical Care Utilization and the Transcendental Meditation Program*, and Kabat-Zinn J, Masson AO, Kristeller J, et al., *Effectiveness of a Meditation-Based Stress Reduction Program in the Treatment Of Anxiety Disorders*, have concluded that meditation has many significant health benefits. People use meditation to fight depression and anxiety, improve mental flexibility, and may even slow the physiological affects of aging.

#### **Imaging**

Imagery is consciously creating a chosen state of consciousness. It is both a mental process and a wide variety of procedures used to encourage changes in attitude, behavior and physiological/biochemical reactions. Imagery includes all the senses—sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, and kinesthetic. Imagery is a major ingredient in many behavioral therapies, even some that are not labeled "imagery." Since it often involves directed concentration, it can be thought of as a directed form of meditation. Practices that incorporate imagery may include biofeedback, relaxation therapy, desensitization, psycho-synthesis, gestalt therapy, rational emotive therapy and hypnosis.

**Next Time: Alternative Medicines and Methods Continued: herbal supplements.**

