

# Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

March 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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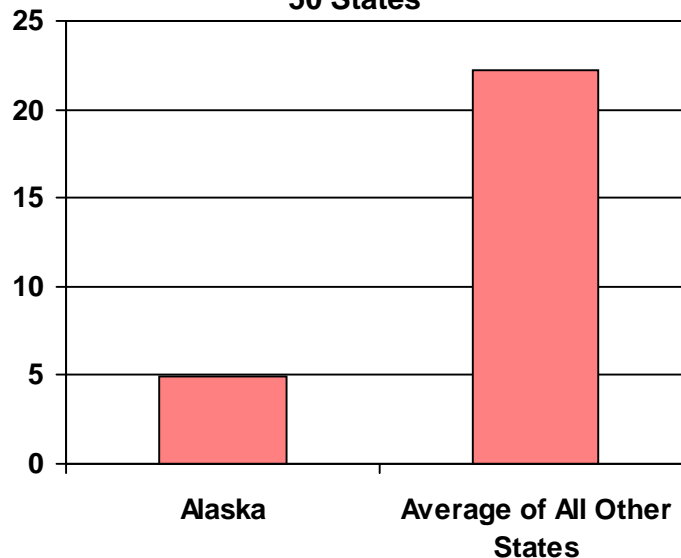
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Percentage of Hospice Use Among the 50 States



Percentage of Medicare-eligible patients who used a hospice during their last year of life, according to year 2000 figures. Usage was highest in Arizona at 46%. Maine was next lowest at 9.1%. Source: Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care and National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

## Alaska Uses Hospice Less Than Other States

According to a report in the Associated Press, terminally ill patients are spending fewer of their last days in hospice care.

The report, by Last Acts, a coalition of health and aging groups, looked at the availability of good end-of-life care. One central measure is hospice care, which provides dying patients with such services as pain relief and assistance in putting their affairs in order. It usually is offered in patients' own homes, and Medicare pays for it.

Hospice brings together an interdisciplinary team of experts including physicians, nurses, social workers, clergy and volunteers to provide customized comfort care for individuals who are in the final stages of their lives. Hospice treats the whole patient, not just their physical symptoms. It provides psychological, spiritual and emotional support for the patient and their family. Most importantly, it allows the patient to be in control of their care, which enables them to maintain their sense of independence and dignity.

More people are turning to hospice care, the report said. Enrollment jumped from about 1,000 a year in 1975, when hospice care began in the United States, to 700,000 in 2000.

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## Hospice and Home Care (continued)

But they are entering hospice care ever closer to the time of death. Patients spent an average of 70 days in hospice care in 1983, but that dropped to 36 days by the late 1990s, the report said. In 1998, 28 percent of hospice patients were enrolled for one week or less before they died.

Hospice care varies widely by state. In 2000, hospice was most popular in Arizona, where between one-third and half of patients over age 65 used it during their last year of life. It was least popular in Alaska and Maine, where less than 10 percent of the dying elderly used it.

Medicare pays for hospice for patients considered likely to die within six months, and Last Acts cited studies suggesting patients must participate for at least 60 days to get the maximum benefit.

It's not known why hospice time is dropping, although recent studies have found it is harder to predict remaining life expectancy with certain diseases. Some cancers, for instance, progress steadily while other diseases, such as heart failure, may wax and wane.

Two years ago, Congress urged Medicare to remind doctors that if a patient lives longer than the six months initially expected, recertifying that he or she remains close to death ensures that payment continues. Medicare officials issue periodic reminders explaining that, but it still causes confusion, said Judith Peres, co-author of the report.

According to the National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization, Alaska currently has 9 hospice organizations:

Alascare Hospice & Home Care Services  
4200 Lake Otis Pky  
Anchorage, AK 99508  
(907) 562-2003

Ketchikan Hospice  
PO Box 7973  
Ketchikan, AK 99801  
(907) 225-7973

Hospice of Anchorage  
500 West International Airport Road, Suite C  
Anchorage Alaska 99518  
(907) 561-5322  
hospice@ak.net

Sitka's Faith in Action, Inc.  
PO Box 6336  
Sitka, AK 99835  
(907) 647-3678

Hospice of The Tanana Valley  
PO Box 82770  
Fairbanks, AK 99708  
(907) 474-0311

Hospice of The Central Peninsula Inc Fox  
35477 Kenai Spur Hwy  
Soldotna AK 99669  
(907) 262-4961

Hospice of Homer  
395 E Pioneer Ave  
Homer, AK 99603  
(907) 235-6899

Valley Health Hospice of Mat-Su  
950 E. Bogard Rd. Suite 133  
Wasilla, Alaska  
907 352-2845  
m.littlefair@valley-hosp.com

Alaska Home Care Association  
c/o Hospice & Home Care of Juneau  
3200 Hospital Drive Suite 100  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
(907) 463-3113

## **ACoA Partners with Rasmuson Foundation to Address Senior Center Needs**

The Alaska Commission on Aging has received a letter of interest from the Rasmuson Foundation to improve the condition of senior center facilities throughout the State of Alaska. The Commission has been working since last year with Alaska's senior centers to seek funding from the Rasmuson Foundation for capital needs improvement.

The Rasmuson Foundation was created in 1955 by Jenny Rasmuson to honor her late husband, "E.A." Rasmuson. The Foundation supports projects of lasting impact for the public benefit of all Alaskans, ensuring that basic human needs are met and that the quality of life for all Alaskans is enhanced. The Foundation seeks to support not-for-profit organizations that are focused and effective in the pursuit of their goals.

The Rasmuson Foundation primarily funds capital projects such as building construction and renovation, or purchase of equipment, vehicles, musical instruments, sports equipment, computers, medical equipment, audio/video equipment, books, etc. They do not fund supplies that are part of your annual operating budget.

The following 29 senior centers are participating in the capital needs improvement project:

- Angoon Senior Center
- Cordova Community Center
- Craig/Klawock Senior Center
- Dillingham Senior Center
- Haines Senior Center
- Homer Senior Center
- Hoonah Senior Center
- Hydaburg Senior Center
- Juneau Senior Center
- Kake Senior Center
- Kenai Senior Center
- Ketchikan Senior Center
- Metlakatla Senior Center
- Mountain View Manor, Juneau
- Nenana Tortella Council
- Nikiski Senior Citizens, Inc.
- North Star Council on Aging Senior Center, Fairbanks
- Palmer Senior Citizens Center, Inc.
- Senior Citizens of Kodiak, Inc.
- Seward Senior Center
- Sitka Swan Lake Senior Center
- Skagway Senior Center
- Soldotna Area Senior Citizens, Inc.
- Sterling Area Sr. Citizen's Inc.
- Tok Senior Center
- Valdez Senior Citizens Center
- Wasilla Senior Center
- Wrangell Senior Center
- Yakutat Senior Center

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