

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger



Frank H. Murkowski
Governor

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

March 2005



Joel Gilbertson
Commissioner

Alaska's First 2005 White House Conference on Aging Forum Generates Plethora of Policy Suggestions



Juneau seniors, providers and interested community members brainstorm solutions in small working groups at the Juneau Senior Center during the Alaska Commission on Aging's first "Future of Aging in Alaska" community forum to gather input for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. The event was co-sponsored by the Juneau Commission on Aging. (ACoA Staff photo.)

As the late-winter afternoon sun streamed into the Juneau Senior Center, over 50 Juneau seniors, care providers and other interested persons gathered for the Alaska Commission on Aging's first "Future of Aging in Alaska" community forum on Friday, February 25th. Conversations flowed, ideas percolated and participants reported finding the fast-paced event to be fun, fair and energizing.

After short introductions by Alaska Commission on Aging chair Banarsi Lal, ACoA Executive Director Linda Gohl, and Juneau Commission

on Aging chair Lorilyn Swanson, participants quickly plunged into a discussion of the first of four broad topics (Health and Long-Term Care, Financial Security, Community Resources, and Social Well-being and Employment). With the facilitation of Nancy Karacand of the ACoA staff, the group discussed each of the topics at their tables, reporting their top recommendations at the end of each topic session. All recommendations were recorded and will be included in the ACoA's report to the White House Conference on Aging.

The event was the first in a series of ACoA-sponsored community forums designed to capture the ideas and recommendations of Alaskan seniors and caregivers on issues of concern for the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. (Other forums are scheduled for Anchorage, Wasilla and Fairbanks.)

After their annual Juneau meeting on February 22nd through the 24th, Alaska Commission on Aging members remained in town to participate in Alaska's first White House Conference on *(Continued on page 4.)*

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(ACoA).

The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to advocate for policies, programs, and services that promote the dignity and independence of Alaska's seniors and help them maintain a meaningful quality of life.

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Aging Boomers to Alter Nation's Landscape

Today, 35 million Americans are 65 or older. In less than eight years, those numbers will more than double as 76 million baby boomers begin reaching retirement age. As America's population continues to mature, states must prepare for unprecedented challenges while looking for new ways to meet the evolving needs of their seniors, according to a new report released by the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices.

The report, *Measuring the Years: State Aging Trends and Indicators*, illustrates an array of concerns ranging from seniors' health and financial self-sufficiency to state housing and transportation requirements. Among the more notable findings, the report reflects that:

- By 2025, states will experience a significant change in the proportion of seniors. (The percentage of Alaskans who are age 65 and over is expected to grow from 6.2% in 2003 to 17.2% in 2029.)
- States are expected to experience dramatic shortfalls in the long-term care workforce.

- State health and aging officials now consider chronic disease prevention and control a higher priority than access to health care or prescription drugs.
- Most of seniors' wealth is in the form of home equity. Excluding home equity, seniors' median income totals only \$23,369.

As a group, today's seniors are living longer and with more resources than their predecessors. Still, the report indicates that unless chronic disease prevention is enacted today, an aging population will test the already financially-stretched state and local governments, and the increasingly over-burdened health care systems.

According to the report, half the nation's seniors live with at least two chronic health conditions and more than 80 percent suffer from at least one chronic condition.

"Every aspect of people's lives will be affected by demographic changes. Consequently, planning must involve all aspects of state governments. There is, and will continue to be, a need for collaboration across state departments and agencies," according to the report.

Looming Labor Shortage? Or Time to Retire Retirement?

A recent (Summer 2004) issue of the *Public Policy & Aging Report*, a publication of the National Academy on an Aging Society (a policy institute of The Gerontological Society of America) addressed the projected labor shortage which many economists warn will envelop the United States as the “Baby Boomer” generation (born between 1946 and 1964) begins to reach retirement age within the next five to ten years.

Articles by a number of authors present a range of perspectives on this upcoming demographic development of unprecedented proportions. The following excerpts convey some of these views:

“Despite all the attention paid to the baby boom, many people do not fully appreciate what an extraordinary demographic blip it was or understand how it enhanced our economic performance... The surge in birth rates after World War II meant that some 20 to 25 years later, young workers flooded the labor markets with a massive influx of cheap labor.

“Ultimately, the labor market will reach equilibrium. The true challenge will be living with disappointing rates of improvement in standards of living if there is not enough labor to produce what we aspire to consume. The reality is that, without either

a boost in labor productivity or higher rates of workforce participation, standards of living may, for the first time in a long while, quit rising.

“In that case, policymakers and business leaders will have to try to find an equitable means of doling out the slower growth in standards of living among various groups...The United States could protect workers at the expense of retirees. Indeed, both Germany and Japan have recently changed their retirement systems in ways that are significantly reducing retirement pensions.

“In the United States, this is also occurring with private pensions...many U.S. employers have reduced or eliminated their retiree medical benefits and more are likely to do so in the future. Both of these trends stand to reduce current and future retirees’ standards of living in the future.”

—From an article by researchers Steven A. Nyce, Ph.D., and Sylvester Schieber, Ph.D., of Watson Wyatt Worldwide

“In the past few years, companies have been so focused on downsizing to contain costs that they’ve largely neglected a looming threat to their competitiveness, the likes of which they have never before experienced: a severe shortage of talented

workers....

“The general population is aging and, with it, the labor pool. People are living longer, healthier lives, birthrate is at a historic low.... During the next 15 years, 80 percent of the native-born workforce growth in North America is going to be in the over-50 cohort....

“In the next decade or so, when boomers — the 76 million people born between 1946 and 1964, more than one-quarter of all Americans — start hitting their sixties and contemplating retirement, there won’t be nearly enough young people entering the workforce to compensate for the exodus. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a shortfall of 10 million workers in the United States in 2010, and in countries where the birthrate is well below the population replacement level (particularly in Western Europe), the shortage will hit sooner, be more severe, and remain chronic.

“The problem won’t just be a lack of bodies. Skills, knowledge, experience, and relationships walk out the door every time somebody retires — and they take time and money to replace. Given the inevitable time lag between the demand for skills and the ability of the educational system to provide them, we’ll see a particularly pronounced skill shortage in
(Continued on page 6.)

WHCOA Forum (continued from page 1)

Aging event. Joel Gilbertson, Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services, also dropped by during the afternoon to observe the work of forum participants.

The October conference in Washington, DC — the fifth in a series of White House Conferences on Aging — is tasked with developing recommendations for the next decade of aging policy for the United States. The White House Conference on Aging has a long history of success; while some 35 different White House Conferences on various issues were held during the 20th century, only two were held more than twice, and only the White House Conference on Aging has met four times (this fall's event will be the fifth).

A final report and set of recommendations will be submitted by the Alaska Commission on Aging in advance of the national event.

The Juneau event was co-sponsored by the Juneau Commission on Aging, which later decided to plan another (seniors-only) event for Tuesday, March 29th, in order to continue the discussion on topics of interest. The community organizations with which the ACoA is partnering may decide to hold their own additional events in advance of, or following, the official ACoA community forum for their area if they feel such sessions will allow more in-depth consideration of specific issues.

Smaller communities that

the ACoA will be unable to visit for an official event are encouraged to hold their own events to gather information and ideas for the White House Conference on Aging process. A “blueprint kit” to assist communities in planning their own events is available on the ACoA's Web site, www.alaskaaging.org.

ACoA staff will prepare a report on each of the community forums. The report on the Juneau event, which will contain all the recommendations submitted by all the small groups, is expected to be completed and posted on the ACoA Web site shortly. A sample of Juneau participants' recommendations for the broad topic areas is shown below.

Health and Long-Term Care

- Provide universal health care for seniors and everyone. (Table 4)
- Encourage personal responsibility for healthy choices and health care, but have a national safety net with a minimum care standard. (Table 5)
- Better regulation and oversight of pharmaceutical companies, with price controls. (Table 6)

Financial Security

- Maintain Social Security; no diminished benefits. (Table 1)
- Save money, don't borrow; greater fiscal responsibility for government and individuals. (Table 2)
- Increase the \$90,000 salary cap for Social Security deductions. (Table 6)

Community Resources

- Provide recognition, awards and a living wage for service workers. (Table 3)
- Identify the homebound who are living alone and find a way to connect them with the services they need. (Table 6)
- Improve transportation, especially at night — better bus systems, vans, taxi service, etc. (Table 8)

Social Well-Being / Employment

- Increase awareness that all elders want to be included, invited, noticed, seen and heard. (Table 1)
- Put together an inter-generational community recreation center. Bring back a sense of community. (Table 3)
- Consider working longer and/or becoming re-educated for new jobs. (Table 7)

Consumer News New Dietary Guidelines Advise Less Food, More Exercise



The sixth edition of *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* was released

on January 12, 2005 by Health & Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson and Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman. *The Guidelines* represent the federal government's best science-based advice to promote health and reduce risk of chronic diseases through nutrition and physical activity. This edition is the latest in the five-year reviews required by federal law.

The new *Dietary Guidelines*

emphasize choosing a nutritious diet, maintaining a healthy weight, achieving adequate exercise, and keeping foods safe to avoid foodborne illness. The advice is particularly important for "Baby Boomers," older adults, and their caregivers. The document is the basis for federal food programs and nutrition education programs, including the Older Americans Act nutrition programs through Titles III-C and VI.

Eating a healthy balance of nutritious foods continues as a central point in the *Dietary Guidelines*, but balancing nutrients is not enough for health. Total calories also count, especially as more

Americans are gaining weight. Because almost two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese, and more than half get too little physical activity, *The 2005 Dietary Guidelines* place a stronger emphasis on calorie control and physical activity. Major causes of illness and death in the United States are related to poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle.

Several recommendations address special populations such as older adults who are higher risk. *The 2005 Dietary Guidelines*, consumer brochure, and related materials are available at www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.

Free Guide Discusses Caring for Seniors with Alzheimer's

A new 12-page booklet, *Caring for Someone with Alzheimer's*, is available free of charge. The brochure covers Alzheimer's warning signs and explains some of the behaviors that can be encountered on a day-to-day basis.

Published by the American Health Care Association and the National Center for Assisted Living, the guide also addresses nursing facilities, assisted living, home care, respite care and more.

Download or order a printed copy from www.longtermcareliving.com/family_guide/index.htm. The Web site also offers other printed guides, including *A Guide for Families: Having the Conversation About Long-Term Care*.

Free Booklet Advises on Mixing Medications with Alcohol

A free publication called *As You Age: A Guide to Aging, Medicines, and Alcohol* is available through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Older Americans use prescription drugs

approximately three times as often as the general population and have been found to have the poorest rates of compliance with directions for taking medications. Adults over 65 buy 30 percent of all prescription drugs and 40 percent of all over-the-counter drugs, and have six times more hospitalizations

from adverse drug reactions than the general population.

This booklet and many other publications related to older adults' mental health and substance abuse issues may be downloaded or a printed copy ordered from www.samhsa.gov/aging/age_08.aspx.

Retire Retirement? (continued from page 3)

fast-growing technical fields such as health care....

“The good news is that a solution is at hand: Just as companies are learning to market to an aging population, they can also learn to attract and employ older workers....

“Despite irrefutable evidence of workforce aging, many managers may be marching their companies straight off a demographic cliff. Currently, most recruiting, training, and leadership development dollars, as well as promotion opportunities, are directed at younger employees, with little thought to the skills and experience that the over-55 crowd can bring to bear on almost any business problem....

“According to a recent survey from the Society for Human Resource Management, two-thirds of U.S. employers don’t actively recruit older workers; more than half do not actively attempt to retain key ones; 80 percent do not offer any special provisions (such as flexible work arrangements) to appeal to the concerns of mature workers; and 66 percent of CEOs say their companies don’t account for

workforce aging in their long-term business plans....

“Numerous recent studies have shown that boomers want to keep working — and they may need to, for financial reasons.... Many mature workers want to keep working but in a less time-consuming and pressured capacity so that they may pursue other interests. And many boomers have a direct and compelling need for flexibility to accommodate multiple commitments, such as caring for children and elderly parents at the same time....

“Retirement, as it’s currently understood, is a recent phenomenon. For almost all of history, people worked until they died. It was only during the Great Depression that, desperate to make room in the workforce for younger workers, governments, unions, and employers institutionalized retirement programs as we know them today, complete with social security and pension plans....

“But in fact, many people don’t want a life of pure leisure; half of today’s retirees say they’re bored and restless. They’re looking

for different blends — three days a week, for example, or maybe six months a year. Many want or need the income, but that’s not the only motivator. People tend to identify strongly with their work, their disciplines, and their careers. Many wish to learn, grow, try new things, and be productive indefinitely, through a combination of commercial, volunteer, and personal pursuits. They enjoy the sense of self-worth that comes with contributing to a business or other institution, and they enjoy the society of their peers....

“For all these reasons, the notion of retirement as it has come to be practiced — a one-time event that permanently divides work life from leisure — no longer makes sense.”

— from an article by Ken Dychtwald, Ph.D., founding President and CEO of Age Wave, a San Francisco-based think tank and consulting firm focused on the maturing marketplace and workforce; Tamara Erickson of The Concours Group; and Bob Morrison of The Concours Group.

Upcoming: MAY IS OLDER AMERICANS MONTH!

This year’s theme is “Celebrate long-term living!” Posters and logo may be downloaded from the Administration on Aging’s Web site, www.aoa.gov/press/oam/oam.asp.

Events Calendar



The Juneau Commission on Aging will hold a **Seniors-Only Input Session** regarding their concerns on issues impacting seniors. This is the JCOA's second White House Conference on Aging event. It will be held **Tuesday, March 29th** at 1 p.m. at Fireweed Place. For more information contact Lorilyn Swanson, (907) 586-5000.

ACOA Legislative Teleconferences are held every other Thursday from 9:30 to 11 a.m. (weekly toward the end of session) to discuss pending legislation of interest to seniors. If you wish to participate, visit the Commission's Web site at www.alaskaaging.org to find a list of the bills to be discussed and to discover from which site(s) in your community you may access the teleconference. Future teleconference dates include **March 31, April 14, April 28, May 5, and May 12, 2005**.

ADRD (Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders) Training will be offered in three Southeast Alaska communities featuring Ron Lucchino, Ph.D. and Vicki Schmall, Ph.D. They will be in Sitka on **April 18th**, Juneau on **April 19th**, and Ketchikan on **April 21st, 2005**. In each location they will present a one-day training conference for in-home and community-based caregivers. Funding for participation and travel expenses is available through a grant from the Alaska Commission on Aging and Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. Contact Chona Guilas at UAS Sitka for more information. She can be reached by phone at (907) 747-7728 or by email at Chona.Guilas@uas.alaska.edu.

Full Lives Conference 2005 – Paths to Belonging will be held at the Sheraton Anchorage Hotel on **April 21–22, 2005**. Full Lives is a statewide education, training and networking opportunity for senior services, mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse direct service professionals (the hands-on, front line staff) those who supervise them, and individuals and families receiving services. On April 21 from 6 to 8 p.m., the Alaska Commission on Aging will sponsor a 2005 White House Conference on Aging community forum at the Sheraton Anchorage, following a reception from 5 to 6 p.m. This event is targeted to employers and direct service providers.

The Future of Aging in Alaska, a 2005 White House Conference on Aging community forum for **Anchorage area** seniors and care providers will be held at the Anchorage Senior Center, 1300 E. 19th, on Friday, **April 22nd, 2005** from 1 to 4:30 p.m. This event, sponsored by the Alaska Commission on Aging and the Anchorage Senior Citizens Advisory Commission, will seek recommendations on Health and Long-Term Care, Financial Security, Community Resources, and Social Well-Being.

Health and Wellness Strategies for Alaska Elders. The UAF Northern Region Geriatric Education Center will present a mini-conference **April 23, 2005** at the Wedgewood Resort Gazebo Room in Fairbanks. Vicki Schmall of Aging Concerns, Marty Richards of the Northwest Geriatric Education Center, Dr. Carol Ballew of the Alaska Native Health Board, and Dr. Bert Mathieson of the Alaska Center for Natural Medicine will speak on strategies for promoting healthy aging. For more information, contact Denise Daniello at (907) 456-1380 or at fnldl1@uaf.edu.

The Future of Aging in Alaska, a 2005 White House Conference on Aging community forum for the **Mat-Su Valley** seniors and care providers, will be held at the Lake Lucille Inn in Wasilla on Thursday, **May 19th, 2005**. Times and further details will be provided in the next issue of this newsletter.

The Future of Aging in Alaska, a 2005 White House Conference on Aging community forum for **Fairbanks area** seniors and care providers, will be held on Friday, **June 3rd, 2005**. Time, place and other details will be provided in the next issue of this newsletter.

Info Bytes and Web Sites

Want to Live to Be 100?



Estimate your longevity potential by taking the Living to 100 Quiz at www.livingto100.com. The site's life expectancy calculator translates studies of centenarians and other longevity research into a practical and empowering tool for individuals to estimate their longevity potential. Each question is followed by an explanation of why that item is related to your longevity potential. The site is sponsored by the Alliance for Aging Research, a not-for-profit organization based in Washington, DC.

What's Your Real Age?

What is your biological age? Is your body older or younger than your calendar age? Find out by taking the RealAge test at www.realage.com. The web site is designed to help users lower their biological age by providing health tips, diet and fitness tools, and personalized

health information and assessments for cancer, heart attack, type 2 diabetes and other conditions.

A free subscription to RealAge's newsletter is available at the Web site. The daily tips are generally

helpful and interesting. Note, however, that those who take the online quiz without choosing to subscribe may receive unsolicited emails from the site.

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