

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)

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Jonathan Sherwood
Juneau

Executive Director
Jane P. Demmert
P O Box 110209
Juneau, AK 99811-0209
(907) 465-3250
Jane_Demmert
@admin.state.ak.us

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The MANY FACES OF AGING



May is Older Americans Month and Older Alaskans Month

In this, the 38th Older Americans Month, the U.S. Administration on Aging calls on Americans to recognize and respond to the growing diversity of older Americans. By the middle of the 21st century, every third older person will be from a minority group. The unique differences among our aging population compel us to address how we might best serve a myriad of unique ethnic, cultural, inter- and intra-generational, geographic and gender-specific interests and needs.

Governor Knowles Salutes Alaskan Seniors

Governor Knowles issued an Executive Proclamation naming May 2001 *Older Alaskans Month*. The text of the proclamation, which was signed April 26th, reads as follows:

“During the month of May we celebrate the remarkable contributions of our elders. At the same time, we recommit ourselves to the idea that older Americans are among our greatest treasures with their invaluable links to the past providing wise counsel for the future.

As we honor the contributions older Americans have made and continue to make to our state and our nation, it is important we ensure elders are able to lead independent, active, and fulfilling lives. It is also important to recognize that more Americans are living longer than ever before; across the generations, we would do well to maximize our potential for aging in a positive way.

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Dynamics of Aging in Alaska

(continued from the April issue of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger*)

In last month's issue of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger*, we looked at markers of a high quality of life as we age, and at the benefits we bring to our communities as we age. This month we discuss some of the challenges we may experience as we age, and their implications across Alaska.

Challenges:

This proportional increase in population brings with it new economic dynamics. These include the costs associated with healthcare, which are common to the aging population of the entire country.

Alzheimer's Disease:

There are currently an estimated 35,658 Alaskans age 65 and over. An estimated 4,000 Alaskan seniors currently have Alzheimer's Disease. By 2025 an estimated 124,303 Alaskans will be age 65+. Of that population, an estimated 15,700 will be at-risk for Alzheimer's Disease. These data come from population projections from the Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis, and *Estimated Prevalence of Alzheimer's Disease in the United States*, Denis A. Evans, et. al., in *The Milbank Quarterly*.

The affect of Alzheimer's disease is significant, reaching beyond the person with the disease to their family, caregivers, and the community as a whole. The particular impact is often borne by Alzheimer's caregivers, the majority of whom are family members of those with Alzheimer's rather than professional care providers. These unpaid volunteers are often ill-equipped for the 24 hour a day task of caring for a person with Alzheimer's. Impacts on caregivers include:

- 1 in 8 become ill or injured
- 1 in 3 use medication for problems related to caregiving
- Higher levels of financial strain
- Twice as likely as other caregivers to be providing the highest level of care
- Seriously affects employment status

Additionally, many caregivers are committed for the long term, caring for loved ones for *five or more years*.

Family caregivers blunt the economic impact of this disease. Non-paid friends and family members care for an astonishing 70% of Americans affected by Alzheimer's! Nationally, Alzheimer's disease costs an estimated \$174,000 per patient. About 4,000 Alaskan seniors have Alzheimer's Disease currently. The work of private individuals significantly reduces the cost of Alzheimer's disease to the state as a whole. As the incidence of Alzheimer's increases in Alaska (an estimated 15,700 at risk for the disease by 2025) private citizens will have difficulty continuing to provide this level of aid.

Progress Achieved and What Lies Ahead:

The cumulative effect of constructive legislation comes into focus through a short review. These bills and related actions improve state policy and practice in regard to health and personal care, personal safety, and recognition and respect accorded to older Alaskans. These improvements improve the basic quality of life we experience as we age.

1999 Legislation

- Increased protection of vulnerable adults
- Licensing of home health care agencies, and timely release of long-term care service and facility inspection and investigation reports
- Long Term Care Task Force reauthorization

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Governor Knowles Declares May *Older Alaskans Month* (Continued from Page 1.)

In Alaska, by the year 2025, more than one in six residents will be 65 years old or older, with an unprecedented number of sourdoughs choosing to make Alaska their lifelong home. This is a remarkable opportunity for Alaskans of all ages to draw on the wisdom of our elders. With the wisdom and guidance of Alaska's pioneers, our communities are better places to live, work, and raise our families.

Now, therefore, I, Tony Knowles, Governor of the State of Alaska, do hereby proclaim the month of May 2001 as *Older Alaskans Month* in Alaska, and encourage Alaskans of all generations to acknowledge and celebrate the many contributions of our elders, who do so much to enrich our families, our communities, and our state.”

Dynamics of Aging in Alaska (Continued from Page 2.)

- New strategy and framework for state process to authorize construction of increased nursing home capacity

2000 Legislation and funding

- Increased rates paid to assisted living providers caring for General Relief clients, to more adequately pay for services provided
- Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
 - Start up of low-interest financing/refinancing for assisted living home facilities
 - Start up of small grants for accessibility modifications for seniors' homes when need is demonstrated

2001 Legislation

- Payment for breast and cervical cancer treatments for limited income Alaskans whose cancers were detected through a Centers for Disease Control outreach program
- Resolution urging Federal and State outreach to educate Alaskans on the costs of long-term care, the value of participation in long-term care insurance, and the merits of providing incentives, including tax benefits for those who invest in long-term care insurance
- Transfer of Long Term Care Ombudsman office to Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, and establishing new minimum salary for the position
- House Special Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs established
- World War II veterans who left high school to enlist are awarded high school diplomas

2002 – The Work Ahead

Secure passage of:

- 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
- 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

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Dynamics of Aging in Alaska (Continued from Page 3.)

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
 - 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

How You Can Help:

If you are reading this issue, it's likely you're involved in advocating for Alaskan seniors. If so, you're probably already working on one or more of these issues. If not, there are many possibilities for becoming involved, including:

- **Seek out your local Commission on Aging:** Contact your local City Hall for information
- **Join the Alaska Commission on Aging Legislative Teleconferences:** Held at least every other Tuesday while the Alaska Legislature is in session. Information available on our Web site, www.AlaskaAging.org, or by calling (907) 465-3250
- **Join the Senior Advocacy Coalition:** Call (907) 261-4140, 261-4848, 338-6492 in Anchorage, (907) 235-7355 in Homer, or (907) 463-6153 in Juneau.
- **Speak out as an individual on the issues that affect us as we age:** Contact your Legislators and local government officials through the mail, the phone, or even email. Find all Legislative contact information on line at www.legis.state.ak.us.

Working together, we can meet the challenges and make the most of the opportunities we face in the years ahead.

Alaska Commission on Aging to Meet in May and June

The Alaska Commission on Aging will meet in Juneau May 30th and 31st at the Guesthouse International Inn, Ray Renshaw Room at the Juneau Airport. During the meeting, the Commission plans to award Senior Community Service Employment Program new "regional model" grants, and a Home and Community Based Services grant for a workshop to be held in August of this year. The Commissioners plans to meet in executive session on the first day to interview candidates for the position of ACoA Director, and hear public comment Thursday, May 31st.

The regular quarterly Commission meeting will be held June 12th – 14th at the Anchorage Sheraton Hotel's Kuskokwim Room. This meeting will primarily focus on renewing current grants for Nutrition, Transportation, and Support Services, Home and Community Based Services, and the Senior Community Service Employment Program. Current Mental Health Trust Authority funded grants will be considered for renewal, and new grants will be awarded. The Commission will hear public comment each day. The Commissioners also plan to visit Wasilla Senior Center, and attend the ribbon cutting for new Adult Day Center facility at the Chugiak Senior Center.

For more information on these two Commission meetings, please contact Lillian Bradley at (907) 465-3250.