

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

October 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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Commissioners and staff share lunch with local elders at Bethel Senior Center during their quarterly meeting. Commissioners pictured include (left to right) Alison Elgee, Ella Craig, and Peggy Burgin.

Commissioners Visit Bethel for Fall Meeting

The Alaska Commission on Aging held its autumn quarterly meeting in Bethel September 10-12 at the Longhouse Bethel Inn. The meeting was a productive one, despite a few challenges. The third day of the meeting in Bethel was cut short when the evening flight out of Bethel was cancelled, and attendees had to leave for home on an earlier flight. The balance of the Commission's business for the meeting was continued via teleconference on October first.

Highlights of the actions taken during the meeting include awarding Nikiski Senior Citizens the Older Worker Specialist grant for the Kenai Peninsula. Services will start November 1 if the position can be filled by then.

The Commission also approved a set of policies and procedures for grants management.

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The Faces Of Elder Abuse

The 10th Annual Care of the Elderly Conference was held September 20-21 in Sitka, Alaska. As in past years, this conference provides Alaskan caregivers training, guidance, and inspiration for caring for all of us as we age. In this and future issues of Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger, some of the lectures delivered at the conference will be summarized.

Diana Boutin is a Registered Nurse and Special Agent with the California Office of the Attorney General, Bureau of Medi-Cal Fraud and Elder Abuse. She has held the position since 1981.

Special Agent Boutin described elder abuse as passive and/or active neglect, intentional or unintentional failure to meet the physical, social, or emotional needs of an elder in one's care.

Estimates indicate that only one in five cases of elder abuse are ever reported. At least 5% of all elders are abused or neglected, and that figure is rising steadily. Elders over the age of 80 are abused three times more often than younger elders. Nearly 2/3 of abusers are family members.

Elder abuse falls into the following categories:

- Physical Abuse: intentional harm to the victim.
- Material/Financial Abuse: misappropriation or misuse of an elder's property or finances.
- Psychological Abuse: intentional infliction of mental harm.
- Sexual Abuse: any sexual activity without the elder's consent.
- Violation of Basic Rights: deprivation of any rights such as privacy or freedom of religion.
- Self-Neglect: when the elder fails to properly meet his or her own needs.

Most cases of abuse include a combination of these types.

Potential signs of **neglect** include:

- Evidence that personal care is lacking
- Malnutrition
- Chronic untreated health problems
- Dehydration
- Pressure sores, or other untreated sores

Potential signs of **physical abuse** include:

- Trauma (bruises, scratches, burns)
- Signs of restraint
- Repeated injuries
- Inconsistent explanation of injuries
- History of doctor shopping (visiting a variety of doctors to avoid suspicion over repeated injuries, or looking for someone to give the diagnosis the elder is seeking—this is an indication of abuse in the home)
- Repeated unexplained injuries
- Combination of old and new bruises
- Shape of bruises (i.e.: thin and curved as if whipped by an electrical cord)

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The Faces of Elder Abuse (continued from page 2)

Potential signs of **financial abuse** include:

- Unusual bank activity
- Bank statements no longer go to the elder
- Documents the elder has signed but can't explain or understand
- Elders living conditions do not match the size of their estate
- Caregiver seems to be only concerned with the elder's financial status
- Elder's personal belongings are missing
- Signatures don't match the elder's
- Recent new "friends" seem to be devoted to the elder

Potential signs of **psychological abuse**:

- Ambivalence, shame, passivity toward caregiver
- Anxiety around the caregiver
- Depression
- Unusual confusion
- Trembling, clinging, cowering
- Lack of eye contact
- Evasiveness
- Agitation
- Hypervigilant

Potential signs of **sexual abuse**:

- Trauma to the genitals
- Venereal disease
- Infections
- Psychological trauma
- Talk of a new "girlfriend/boyfriend" when the elder is not capable of having such a relationship

Potential signs of **violation of basic rights**:

- Withholding mail
- Intentional obstruction of religious observance
- Doors are removed or have had outside locks installed
- Caregiver forbids the elder to speak when the caregiver is not present
- Caregiver exhibits anger or indifference toward elder
- Elder oversedated or overmedicated

In Alaska, suspected elder abuse can be reported to Adult Protective Services.

Statewide toll free number: 1-800-478-9996

Anchorage: (907) 269-3666

Fairbanks: (907) 451-3187

Juneau: (907) 465-4791

A reporting form is available on the Adult Protective Services Website: www.state.ak.us/admin/dss/aps.htm

Commissioners in Bethel (Continued from page 1)

These are published on the Commission Web site, www.AlaskaAging.org.

The Commission decided that Bob Taylor should continue as Acting Director of the Commission through December 6. They also approved a new definition of “rural” to be used for funding allocation for Title III funds (see below).

On September 11 some of the Commissioners and staff traveled by boat to visit Napaskiak. They toured Zack Williams School and visited the Yup’ik Immersion class, discussed elder mobility challenges with village officials, and visited the Russian Orthodox church. Originally, Commissioners had planned to visit the villages of Napakiak, Aniak, Tuluksak Nunapitchuk and Quinhagak, but poor weather grounded flights and curtailed boat travel that day. Instead, those Commissioners who did not make it to Napaskiak toured Bethel and attended a September 11 memorial service. On Thursday, all of the Commissioners toured the Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Health Hospital, Lulu Heron Housing Project, Ayalpik Elder Congregate Housing, and had lunch with elders at the Bethel Senior Center. Peggy Burgin and a staff member attended a Bethel Chamber of Commerce luncheon to answer questions about the Commission’s work.

Commissioners Approve “Rural” Definition for Title III Fund Allocation

The Commission’s newly approved definition of “rural” is meant to provide guidance to the Commission staff so that a geographic area can be identified as rural or urban without subjectivity or debate. This definition has bearing on allocation amounts for Title III funds, as the current allocation formula calls for 20% of the funds to be allocated by the total number of rural citizens (not just elders). The Commissioners feel that while the new definition is not perfect, it is functional. It is meant to identify regions of Alaska, not individual communities.

The definition is based on the current Alaska Housing Finance Corporation definition of rural, but includes language to account for Southeast Alaska outside of Juneau. It reads as follows:

A community with a population of 10,000 or less that is not connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks, or a population of 1,600 or less that is connected by road or rail to Anchorage or Fairbanks and at least 50 statute miles outside of Anchorage or 25 statute miles outside of Fairbanks. “Connected by road” does not include a connection by the Alaska Marine Highway system or international highway.

This new definition will be used by the Commission in State Plan 2003-2007, which is being formulated now. The definition will be linked with year 2000 census figures to revise the allocation formula.

Senior Advocacy Coalition Monthly Teleconferences

The Senior Advocacy Coalition meets by teleconference from 9:30 to 11:30 AM on the second Friday of every month to address issues affecting Alaska’s seniors. The teleconference originates at the Anchorage Senior Center.

For more information on joining a meeting, contact Sue Samet, 261-4140, Lila Berry, 261-4848, or Brenda Brown, 338-6492 in Anchorage; Fred Lau, 235-7655 in Homer; or Lisa Morley, 465-4798 in Juneau.

You can read *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger* on line at www.AlaskaAging.org. **To receive email notification when a new issue is on line, contact:**

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