

Senior and Disabilities Services

MISSION:

...to maximize the independence and quality of life for older and disabled Alaskans.



Rod Moline, Senior and Disabilities Services Division Director.

“Our programs and services provide opportunities for independence and choice for many elderly and disabled Alaskans. As we learn to listen to stakeholders and consumers, we’re better able to serve effectively.”

—Rod Moline, Director

The **Division of Senior and Disabilities Services** provides a full range of care for Alaska seniors and disabled Alaskans in one agency. The division, newly formed in 2003, includes the Division of Senior Services, formerly in the Department of Administration; Adult Public Assistance, formerly in the Division of Public Assistance; several other functions from the former Division of Medical Assistance; and Developmental Disabilities Services, formerly with the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities.

The division offers services that help consumers attain and maintain personal and stable financial independence for as long as possible. Consumers are offered support and services that allow them to live and age in their chosen community in the least restrictive environment.

Personal choice, satisfaction, safety and positive outcomes are the focus of services for individuals and their families. Those receiving services and their families are included in decision-making regarding their care and services.

To achieve its mission, the division believes that performance management in the human service field should be an

interactive process that includes setting and clarifying goals; developing targets and measures to assess progress; allocating public resources; and holding public agencies and officials accountable.

The division’s management believes that performance management is the most effective method to assure that the best services are delivered to the division’s consumers. Although reorganization is a process fraught with unanticipated outcomes and obstacles, and progress in Senior and Disability Services is slow because of the complexity of bringing services that were scattered into a cohesive whole, progress is being made.

The progress can be measured in a variety of ways. For example, the Adult Protective Services section responded to 1,636 statewide reports of concern in fiscal year 2005. The program protects the elderly from abuse, neglect and exploitation by educating and training the public and social service providers, and health and law enforcement agencies, regarding the system, statutes and regulations on elder abuse and requirements for assisted living homes.

The newly formed division has developed and implemented new developmental

disabilities certification regulations, intended to bring providers into compliance with a new universal application process, which benefits all consumers. Currently, there are 1,289 active care providers statewide for all Medicaid waivers. The division has also developed many guidelines for staff and providers, including a policies and procedures manual, a rewrite of the durable medical equipment manual, the care coordination certification manual, and the First Health Medicaid Waiver training curriculum.

Since fiscal year 2003, personal care assistant services to rural communities have expanded to include new communities from Allakaket to Ward Cove, and many in between. Personal care assistant services are now available in 148 communities through 55 approved provider agencies, an increase of 33 percent and 44 percent respectively.

In the last year, the SeniorCare Program has recruited and trained 127 volunteers statewide to help seniors understand Medicare and the new prescription drug plan. The office has also helped conduct training sessions for Medicaid eligibility technicians in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region.

Accomplishments 2003-05 Highlights

- Implemented a Technical Assistance Plan as a quality assurance requirement for site visits, and developed and implemented a consolidated Habilitation Plan/Plan of Care.
- Restructured management of the Complex Medical Conditions Program in the Anchorage office, and developed and refined the Advanced Care Coordination curriculum, offering training in Anchorage, Juneau, Fairbanks, Wasilla and Kenai.
- Developed and implemented standards for Indian Child Welfare Act reunification and permanency for children on waivers.

- Implemented a new Consumer Assessment Tool in May 2004, which is an effective assessment tool to determine nursing home level of care for the Older Alaskan and Adults with Physical Disabilities waivers.
- Successfully transitioned 92 clients from nursing homes around the state back into their own homes (see story page 41).

What we continue to work on

Among the division's top works in progress are revising the Developmental Disabilities Program certification application packet to make the process even more efficient for providers, and establishing a multidisciplinary team by spring of 2006 to staff cases of elder abuse. Other plans include identifying needed but currently unavailable services related to Developmental Disabilities and Children with Complex Medical Conditions throughout the state; determining the feasibility of service delivery to each community; and developing and implementing a plan to serve those communities.

In the interest of more efficiency, the division plans to put into practice a Web-based program to allow nursing homes to bill Medicaid, followed by a similar pilot program for personal care assistant and Medicaid waivers billings.

To further serve seniors, the division is recruiting and coordinating a virtual Medicare Volunteer Corps that can counsel seniors who call in on the state Medicare hotline toll-free number. This plan also entails developing Medicare volunteers in several communities so seniors can address questions to trained individuals close to home.

With the Division of Banking and Securities, the division will commence a Fraud, Waste and Abuse Campaign to make seniors aware of specific fraud scams that are occurring due to the new Medicare prescription drug plan.

Helping nursing home residents get back home is her mission

“My job is particularly gratifying. I get to hug the nursing home residents and provide something for them that will enhance their lives.”

—Rita Walker

Rita Walker has a long title — Nursing Facility Transition Project Coordinator — but her job is actually very simple: she helps people in nursing homes go home.

“I had a man from a village who had a stroke and was in a facility far from home,” she remembers. “He had a teenage son at home he had raised. The first time I talked to him, he cried. I thought, ‘I’m going to get him home, one way or the other.’”

Walker found a caregiver in the man’s village, arranged to fly her to Anchorage for two days of training on how to care for the wheelchair-bound man. Walker also takes care of the small things for her clients: She made sure he went home with a blender because he had trouble swallowing.

“My job is particularly gratifying,” Walker says. “I get to hug the nursing home residents and provide something for them that will enhance their lives.”

Walker’s job with the Division of Senior and Disability Services resulted from a Center for Medicare and Medicaid

Services federal grant. “It comes out of the Americans with Disabilities Act,” Walker explains, “that said people have the right to live where they want to live.” The federal grant ran out this year, but the Legislature funded the position for next year at \$200,000, and that includes Walker’s salary. It’s a very affordable investment considering the lives it improves, she says.

Since coming onboard with the division in 2003, Walker has completed 92 transitions. The average cost of each transition is approximately \$1,700. “I’ve spent as little as \$20 and as much as \$5,000, depending on each person’s needs,” she says. She has helped clients go home to places big — like Anchorage and Fairbanks — and small, like Kipnuk, Talkeetna, Napaskiak, Healy, Kasilof, among many other locations. The transition program has been approved by Medicaid to be reimbursable, and Walker is in the process of trying to achieve that reimbursement.

“Rita has tremendous organizational skills,” Long Term Care Manager Odette Jamieson says. “If someone calls her she’s right on it. For most people, the worst thing you can do is go to a nursing home. They want to be cared for in their own environment.”

Since coming to her position, Walker has visited every nursing home facility in the state to educate staff about what’s available for residents who want to go home.

To qualify for the transition program clients have to be 21 or older, they must want to transition, and the services in their home area must be available. “The client has to be onboard,” she says. “We never do it against someone’s will; they have to want to move.”

“Prior to Rita, because of lack of staff we had a difficult time getting people out of nursing homes who wanted to get out,” Jamieson says. “She created the program, and it works.”



Nursing Facility Transition Project Coordinator Rita Walker often conducts training for facilities staff.