

# ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Frank H. Murkowski  
Governor  
Karleen Jackson  
Commissioner

## WINTER UPDATE 2005-06

PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ALASKANS

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 2

### Governor launches Youth Success Initiative

Program's \$6 million hailed as investment in Alaska's youth

**B**uilding better opportunities for thousands of Alaska youth currently at risk of substance abuse, suicide, or criminal behavior is the incentive for Gov. Frank H. Murkowski's \$6 million Youth Success Initiative budget proposal.

The governor unveiled his plan to provide Alaska's youth with positive alternatives, productive activities, good role models and appropriate mentors during an Oct. 13, 2005, ceremony in Anchorage at the Mountain View Center Boys and Girls Club. Health and Social Services Commissioner Karleen Jackson was also on hand for the announcement.

"My proposal will fund programs with innovative approaches that invest in Alaska's youth," Murkowski said. Murkowski identified several experienced partners chosen to help achieve his goals.

Through a competitive process earlier this summer, the department reached out to statewide nonprofit organizations and selected four with successful records of helping kids and families. The agencies are the Boys and Girls Club of Alaska, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Rural Alaska Community Action Program and the Alaska Association of School Boards.

"Our Alaskan youth need opportunities to engage in productive activities, with the guidance of good role

models and mentors," Commissioner Karleen Jackson said. "By partnering with organizations that have a proven

record of success, we can increase the number of young Alaskans who can realize their full potential and build a solid future for a strong Alaska."

The initiative will provide funding to agencies in exchange for specific programs aimed at helping young Alaskans achieve success.

"A significant investment of this type will change lives and has a proven return on investment — by reducing suicide rates, cutting underage drinking, reducing teen pregnancy and improving the success rate of teenagers in the local labor market," Murkowski said.

The governor included the Youth Success Initiative in his fiscal year 2007 budget proposal.

#### Boys and Girls Club

The Boys and Girls Club of Alaska operates 41 clubhouses from Barrow to Metlakatla, serving more than 30,000 youth. The nonprofit targets youths from low-income families. Boys and Girls Club programs are known for offering



DHSS Commissioner Karleen Jackson addresses Anchorage community members gathered at the Mountain View Center Boys and Girls Club when the governor's \$6 million Youth Success Initiative proposal was announced.

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### State veterans home construction on schedule

**W**hen the groundbreaking took place for the Alaska Veterans and Pioneers Home in Palmer on Aug. 29, 2005, it was an end — and a beginning. The groundbreaking culminated a process that began in the 1970s when the state of Alaska began searching for a way to address the needs of veterans within the state. Feasibility studies identified the needs and preferences for long term-care among Alaska veterans.

As a first step, the state is in the process of a major remodel and upgrade of the Palmer Pioneer Home at an estimated cost of \$3.5 million. The federal Department of Veterans Affairs will contribute 65 percent of the funding and the Alaska Legislature recently approved a 35-percent match.

As of early November 2005, the front office complex was framed and sheathed, and the new roof structure was in place and waiting to be sheathed. Construction was moving inside with upgrades to the heating system and other mechanical improvements. The exterior drive-up loop had been paved along with all new front walks, as well as the installation of a new drainage system.

When Gov. Frank Murkowski signed SB 301 into law on June 15, 2004, designating the Palmer Pioneer Home as the state's home for veterans, he said, "it took more than two decades of creative thinking and hard work to accomplish, but today



The Department of Veterans Affairs requires that a state veterans home have a 20-year useful life cycle. The Palmer home's exterior was nearing completion in early November 2005.

we can do more than welcome veterans to our state. Today we can say 'welcome home' to our Alaska veterans."

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Frank H. Murkowski,  
Governor



## A Healthy Alaska

Ensuring a healthy Alaska has always been important to my administration. Alaska is privileged to have dedicated individuals who strive to keep our citizens safe and healthy. Former Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner Joel Gilbertson is one of these great Alaskans, and the department's accomplishments during his tenure are commendable.

I am pleased that new Commissioner Karleen Jackson will continue to carry out the health and social services initiatives my administration has put in place. As Deputy Commissioner of DHSS, Karleen was instrumental in guiding the department through its largest reorganization in history. I have the utmost confidence that she will continue to lead DHSS into the future.

Among the department's many recent accomplishments, ground was broken on Alaska's first veterans home in Palmer. We all owe a great deal of gratitude to Alaska's veterans for their sacrifices and a veterans home is the least Alaska can do to thank them.

In the area of public health, pandemic flu has been a major topic of discussion recently. Our public health staff has been working tirelessly to keep Alaska safe from the threat of this disturbing possibility by testing mass vaccination abilities and updating the department's pandemic flu response plan.

For our seniors, the expanded SeniorCare legislation, which was designed to dovetail with the new Medicare Part D initiatives, took effect the first of the year and will ensure that all Alaska seniors will have affordable prescription drug benefits.

In addition, the Office of Children's Services has successfully implemented several changes to improve efficiency and better protect Alaska's most vulnerable children and families.

Change is difficult, and sometimes it's hard to see improvements right away, especially in a department as large as Health and Social Services. The stories in this issue of Winter Update 2005-06 are a snapshot of an ongoing process as we strive to better serve all Alaskans.

## State's SeniorCare eases Rx costs

### How SeniorCare helps Alaskans

Alaska's SeniorCare legislation, signed into law by Gov. Frank H. Murkowski in July 2005, offers financial assistance to seniors who qualify by "wrapping around" — augmenting — the new Medicare drug plan. The legislation allows a higher level of income for Alaska seniors to qualify for financial assistance than residents of the other 49 states.

The SeniorCare cash subsidy of \$120 a month continues through June 2007 for seniors with incomes below \$16,133 for individuals or \$21,641 for couples. These low-income seniors can qualify with liquid assets of up to \$6,000 for an individual and \$9,000 for a couple. The Medicare prescription drug program will cover premiums and deductibles for these seniors.

When the Medicare prescription drug benefit begins in January 2006, the SeniorCare drug benefit will cover Medicare Part D premiums and deductibles for Alaska seniors with annual incomes below \$20,913 for individuals or \$28,053 for couples. These low-income seniors can qualify with liquid assets of up to \$50,000 for an individual and \$100,000 for a couple.

#### Deadlines for Medicare enrollees

People with Medicare must make a couple of important decisions in the window of enrollment that opened on Nov. 15, 2005, and closes on May 15, 2006. The drug plan takes effect beginning Jan. 1, 2006. The choice to enroll is the first hurdle to clear.

The second decision concerns those who also have supplemental health insurance. They should have received a letter in October advising whether their supplemental plan offers prescription drug benefits equal to or better than the Medicare prescription drug plan. That information does not eliminate having to make the choice to enroll in Medicare Part D. It's only one piece of information to consider.

#### Medicaid recipients also choose

People currently receiving health care coverage and assistance through the state's Medicaid program will be automatically enrolled in Medicare Part D, but they need to select a plan that meets their needs.

#### What will participation in Part D cost?

The national average cost for premiums under the Medicare Part D plan is \$34 a month. In Alaska there are 11 plans ranging from \$20 to \$64 a month. For people with an existing



Gov. Murkowski explains the state's SeniorCare "safety net" to a group of Alaska seniors. Alaska's plan is designed to address the unique needs of Alaska seniors.

drug benefit as good as or equal to the Medicare plan — who decline enrollment at this time — no penalty will be incurred if they decide to enroll later. However, those without existing prescription drug medication benefit plans who decline enrollment now, then decide to enroll later, will incur a penalty of 1 percent for every month that passes from the initial date enrollment began. The penalty will be assessed annually as long as Medicare prescription drug coverage is in effect.

#### SeniorCare answers by phone or Web

Seniors outside the Anchorage area can call the SeniorCare Information Office toll-free, (800) 478-6065, to help sort through the drug plans being offered. In Anchorage the number is 269-3680. The SeniorCare Information Office Web site offers more information at [www.seniorcare.alaska.gov](http://www.seniorcare.alaska.gov).

## Youth Success Initiative

Continued from page 1

hope, opportunity and a safe environment to Alaska's youth.

#### Big Brothers/Big Sisters

Big Brothers/Big Sisters — first established more than 100 years ago in New York — partners a child with a caring adult who serves as a role model in the child's life. Last year, Big Brothers/Big Sisters matched 497 children in one-to-one mentoring relationships in 30 rural Alaska communities, and 1,000 youths in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau through the Alaska Mentoring Demonstration Project. The project is a collaboration with the National Senior Service Corps, Boys and Girls Clubs, regional Native nonprofit organizations, tribal councils and school districts.

#### Rural Alaska Community Action Program

The Rural Alaska Community Action Program uses a holistic approach to meet rural communities' needs. RurAL CAP's mission is based on building healthy people, sustainable communities, and vibrant cultures across Alaska, which has been its mission since 1965.

#### Alaska Association of School Boards

The Alaska Association of School Boards launched the Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement in the 1990s to encourage adults to help Alaska youth succeed. The organization is a strong DHSS partner from early childhood to post-secondary levels and from schools to a wide variety of community organizations.

All four participating agencies are responsible for developing proposals to achieve success in areas such as alcohol and drug abuse prevention programs; encouraging healthy lifestyles; suicide prevention; job readiness and work preparation; and creating new clubhouses or programs throughout the state.

Gov. Murkowski expects the programs to produce measurable results by giving thousands of Alaska youth skills for success while preparing for life and work.

## Palmer Pioneer Home undergoes remodel for veterans

Continued from page 1

The Department of Veterans Affairs requires that a state veterans home have a 20-year useful life cycle. That means the entire Palmer Pioneer Home structure needed a total remodel to meet current building codes and Department of Veterans Affairs requirements. The Palmer Pioneer Home was built in 1971 on the former site of the Alaska State Fairgrounds.

When completed, the new Alaska Veterans and Pioneers Home will have 79 beds, with 75 percent of those beds designated for veterans and the remaining 25 percent for nonveterans. Residents currently living in the Palmer Pioneer Home will continue to call the facility home, and no one will be relocated or moved from any other Pioneer Home. Veterans will only be relocated by choice. The services provided to veterans in the new state veterans' home will be the same as those currently provided to all residents of the Pioneer Home system.

The advantage to each veteran in the new home will be a \$26.95 per diem allowance paid by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs to the state. This will have a substantial financial impact that will help offset the cost of care to Alaska veterans.

*Editor's note: portions of this story were published previously on page 8 of the Summer 2005 issue of Warriors, a quarterly magazine of the Alaska Department of Military & Veterans Affairs.*

# Healthy Marriage Initiative gets boost as groups use grant money to educate statewide

The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives has been extremely active in its first year of operation, especially since becoming grants manager for 14 Healthy Marriage grantees across the state. “About half of the grantees are faith-based organizations, and, for a number of them, this is their first time receiving government funding,” the Office’s Executive Director Stephanie Wheeler says, “so we want to make sure that they are successful in their efforts.”

**‘We will work with couples to give them skills and have stronger marriages. I am hoping we can get people the help they need.’**

—Sister Mary Ann, Director of Family Outreach, Diocese of Juneau

The grants management is the first hands-on demonstration of what the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives wants to achieve. An important component of grants management is working with grantees to meet their goals.

“For the newer grantees, this has been a learning experience,” Wheeler says. “That is why we are here — to provide technical assistance and support. Part of fulfilling our job is to maintain open lines of communication, track reporting, conduct site visits and verify progress on program outcomes.”

The Office is holding a special face-to-face gathering of all grantees in January to promote collaboration and networking.

“This is a model of what Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is trying to achieve,” Wheeler says.

In 2004, the Department of Health and Social Services awarded the first 11 Healthy Marriages Initiatives grants, totaling \$500,000. The goal is to increase the percentage of healthy, married two-parent families in Alaska. In July 2005, the first 11 grantees were funded for one more year, and three more grants were awarded.

For the Catholic Diocese of Juneau, the \$49,931 award is its first grant from a funding source other than the Catholic Church. The Juneau Healthy Marriage Initiative program provides new and enhanced marriage support services through the Diocese Office of Family Outreach.

“This grant enables us to do parenting classes in eight of the smaller communities in the region, providing funding for resources, for a video series, and for travel to those communities to conduct programs for parents and couples,” says Sister Mary Ann, Diocese Director of Family Outreach.

“We hope to be of service to these communities in helping parents to have better skills to do the job they are trying to do,” Sister Mary Ann says. “We will work with couples to give them skills and have stronger marriages. I am hoping we can get people the help they need.”

Sister Mary Ann met with Wheeler and Tara Horton, the Office’s Associate Coordinator, during a recent site visit to Juneau. “She (Wheeler) had ideas that sounded really helpful to me,” Sister Mary Ann says. Sister Mary Ann especially likes the idea of bringing the grantees together for a videoconference or face-to-face meeting. “We can learn a lot from each other. It’s really helpful to talk to other people who are doing the same thing.”

Karleen Jackson, Commissioner



## Being prepared

If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail — so goes the familiar proverb.

Preparation takes many forms, as you will find when you read the stories in our Winter Update 2005-06.

We are preparing to take care of our veterans, to whom we all owe so much. A \$3.5 million remodeling is well underway at the Palmer Pioneer Home to give our vets an “official” place to live — with partial federal Veterans Affairs subsidy — in their declining years.

We are helping our seniors prepare for the future. To help explain the federal Medicare Part D prescription drug plans, Alaska’s SeniorCare Information Office answers questions and SeniorCare helps fill gaps left in the federal benefit.

Through our Healthy Marriages initiative, we are preparing families to provide healthy environments in which to raise children.

We continue to update you on the Bring The Kids Home initiative. The Division of Behavioral Health’s project is making great progress in bringing back to Alaska youngsters afflicted with severe emotional or substance abuse disorders.

Our Division of Public Health is deeply involved in emergency response preparedness, as well as planning for epidemics and pandemics, such as the avian flu, which has captured headlines around the world recently.

And a disaster that can befall anyone living close to the economic edge is homelessness, which continues to plague our state’s communities. Our Division of Public Assistance is actively preparing its staff and facilities to better serve Alaskans in need of temporary assistance.

While the state — and individuals — can never be totally prepared for the unexpected, putting safety nets into place can make difficult transitions less traumatizing.

We must all be prepared at all times to live our department’s mission: to promote and protect the health and well-being of Alaskans.

## Faith-Based and Community Initiatives unveils Web site

The new Web site for the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives — [www.hss.state.ak.us/fbci/default.htm](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/fbci/default.htm) — was activated and ready for public use on Oct. 15, 2005.

“The reaction has been really positive,” Executive Director Stephanie Wheeler says. “People like the design and layout, and we’ve already had suggestions for things to add in the future.”

Wheeler and others started working on the Web site in January 2005. Lt. Gov. Loren Leman’s office posted the first Faith Based and Community Initiatives site more than a year ago, and Wheeler says that they talked extensively about what the new site should offer. Associate Coordinator Tara Horton took the lead on creating the new Web site.

“We tried to create a user-friendly, informative site about the office, advisory council and history of Faith Based and Community Initiatives in our state,” Wheeler says. “So we have included information about the purpose of the Alaska Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, frequently asked questions, state and federal resources, helpful

articles, and links to state and federal funding opportunities.”

Besides providing information about funding opportunities, Wheeler says that an important purpose of the Web site



is to help foster faith, community, and governmental collaboration.

“There are a number of links on the site to other organizations that have made significant contributions to the initiative and its purpose,” Wheeler says. In order to gain ongoing information on Faith Based and Community Initiatives, users can also sign up for the FBCI Listserv™. The Listserv™ provides members with monthly updates, significant

announcements and weekly grant information from [www.grantstation.com](http://www.grantstation.com).

“Collaboration and partnership are not only about what other folks are doing, but also about who might be interested in sharing resources and collaborating on funding proposals to submit to federal and state governments, and to private foundations,” Wheeler says. “If you are looking at meeting the needs of the community, you really need to find out about who else is providing services, and who else might have an interest in this priority area, so you can talk with them and begin discussing how to partner.”

Although the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is a two-person operation, Wheeler says a top priority is maintaining and keeping current the funding opportunities and resources offered on the Web site. “This is a work in progress — we welcome the input we receive about the Web site,” she says. “We want to make it a site that is beneficial and that the community will use.”

## Department and division positions shift — team leadership remains on course toward same goal

Several changes in leadership have occurred in the Department of Health and Social Services in the last few months, including major moves in the Commissioner's Office.

### Gilbertson moves on, Jackson moves up

Gov. Frank H. Murkowski regretfully accepted former Commissioner Joel Gilbertson's resignation in early August 2005.



Karleen Jackson, Joel Gilbertson

After three years leading the Department of Health and Social Services — and overseeing the largest reorganization in its 84-year history — Gilbertson left government service for the private sector. Gilbertson's last day was Sept. 30, 2005, before beginning his new Anchorage-based job as Director of Strategic Development and Administration with Providence Health System-Alaska Region.

Before moving to Juneau when Murkowski assumed the governorship, Gilbertson had served as the U.S. senator's legislative director and counsel. As Commissioner of DHSS, Gilbertson went to work immediately to improve communications throughout the department and to restructure the divisions to better serve Alaskans in need.

"Under Joel's watch, the department has improved child protective services, reduced social worker caseloads, eliminated overcrowding in our juvenile detention facilities, advocated for a new public health law and programs to reduce youth smoking rates," Murkowski said when he announced Gilbertson's resignation.

"While I will miss serving as commissioner, I remain very excited about the department's future," Gilbertson said in August. "With a great management team at the helm, the department is on a strong course to further this administration's critical initiatives aimed at helping Alaskans."

### Seamless management transition

Within days of Gilbertson's resignation, the governor announced the appointment of Deputy Commissioner Karleen Jackson to the post of Commissioner, effective Oct. 1, 2005.

"Karleen has played an integral part in the leadership of the department during this administration, and I am pleased that she will continue to carry out the health and social services initiatives my administration has put in place," Murkowski said. "She has been in Alaska for almost 40 years, has a strong background in the field of social services, and possesses the skill and talent to serve the people of this state well."

Jackson holds a master's degree in human development and a doctorate in human services from the Fielding Institute. Before coming to the department in early 2003, Jackson was executive director of Catholic Social Services in Anchorage for five years, and had worked for the nonprofit organization since 1991 in various social services positions.

"As the new commissioner, I'm grateful for the time I worked with Joel during the challenges of our recent and ongoing reorganization," Jackson said in early October. "Joel and I worked as a team — and my goal is to continue in a seamless way the initiatives put into place during his tenure."

### Hogan replaces Jackson

Also effective Oct. 1, 2005, was the appointment of William Hogan as Deputy Commissioner. Hogan had been director of the Division of Behavioral Health since April 1, 2003. A certified social worker, Hogan has an extensive background in the field of social services. Before coming to state service, he was CEO of Life Quest, a community mental health center in Wasilla. He holds a master's degree in social work from West Virginia University.



Bill Hogan

"The department is very fortunate to have Bill continue to serve within our framework, and to move into a position where his great leadership and guidance will be even more of an asset," Commissioner Jackson said.

### Willer replaces Hogan

Cristy Willer was promoted to director of the Division of Behavioral Health, replacing Hogan, effective Oct. 1, 2005. "Cristy Willer brings a complete understanding of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service delivery system — and will assuredly continue to promote crucial issues such as the governor's Bring The Kids Home initiative, and substance abuse prevention," former commissioner Gilbertson said at the time of her appointment. Most recently Willer served as Behavioral Health's deputy director. Her extensive experience includes program director for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Services, and interim director for the Community Health Aide Program for Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation. Willer holds bachelor's and master's degrees in anthropology from University of California, Berkeley.



Cristy Willer

### Moline now Senior and Disability Services Director

After serving as acting director of the Division of Senior and Disability Services since June 2005, Rod Moline assumed the directorship effective Sept. 12, 2005. "As acting director, Rod stepped into the leadership role at a critical time when the division faced many challenges," former Commissioner Gilbertson said. "Our agency delivers vital services to thousands of needy adults and children on a daily basis — and we're fortunate to have Rod as the new director."



Rod Moline

Moline has been with DHSS since January 2002. Prior to that, he served 15 years as executive director of the Juneau-based nonprofit REACH, Inc., whose services included respite, care coordination, case management, foster care, vocational support, counseling and treatment for developmentally disabled clients and youth with serious emotional disorders. He holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies from Texas Tech University and a Ph.D. in administration and management from Columbia Pacific University.

## Alaska Children's Trust campaigns against child abuse, neglect

In a statewide effort to reach all Alaskans, the Alaska Children's Trust and the Department of Health and Social Services are working together on a social marketing campaign to prevent child abuse and neglect in Alaska. The statewide television and radio campaign ads began airing Sept. 26, 2005.

The Children's Trust was able to fund this campaign after receiving a \$593,686 federal appropriation to combat child abuse and neglect in the state. Per capita, Alaska ranks high among states for victims of substantiated child abuse and neglect at 22.5 per 1,000 children, as compared to the national average of 10.5. In fiscal year 2004, Alaska had 12,088 protective services reports.

"Child abuse and neglect is a serious problem facing our state," board of trustees chair Margo McCabe said. "It is our hope that this campaign will raise awareness about the issue and empower parents to make healthy parenting decisions."

The campaign includes two television and two radio ads that focus on getting parents to "listen, talk, and play" with their children and seek help if they need it to avoid abuse and neglect. The ads spotlight two families and end with Gov. Frank Murkowski asking Alaskans for help in curbing child abuse.

The Children's Trust also has established a statewide toll-free parent support line (1-800-643-KIDS). Professionals are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to answer parenting questions or refer parents who need additional resources. Additionally, the Children's Trust has benefited from partnerships to maximize this campaign; media organizations have donated more than \$165,000 in bonus spots to help reach more Alaskans across the state.

The Alaska Children's Trust was established in 1988. The first legislative appropriation was made in 1996 for \$6.8 million. Today, the Trust, which operates as a savings account, contains more than \$11.1 million.

Seven trustees, appointed by the governor, oversee the fiduciary and grant-making functions of the Alaska Children's Trust. The trust's interest from the earnings funds small grants of \$30,000 or less to small nonprofits that provide prevention programs for child abuse and neglect.

# Avian influenza: During media outcry, a bit of perspective needed

By **Richard Mandsager, M.D.**  
Division of Public Health Director

It is impossible to watch the news or to pick up a newspaper without hearing or reading about H5N1 avian influenza (“bird flu”), antiviral drug shortages, vaccine stockpiling and, in the case of a pandemic, military-enforced quarantines. Talking heads describe past pandemics, such as the “Spanish flu” of 1918, which killed up to 50 million people worldwide. We see pictures of countless dead chickens. We learn about migratory Asian birds that might bring H5N1 to Alaska and the rest of North America.

Amidst all the increased media attention, a bit of perspective is important. A global influenza epidemic (“influenza pandemic”) occurs only when a new virus appears and is transmitted efficiently from person to person. There were three pandemics during the last century, all involving strains of virus that evolved from avian influenza.

H5N1 primarily infects birds and rarely infects humans. However, the H5N1 strain is unusual in its severity. As of this writing, more than 100 persons in Asia have been infected with H5N1, and roughly half have died. Almost all had exposure to infected domestic poultry. In only a few instances has person-to-person spread of H5N1 infection been suspected. Although the recent spread of avian influenza to Europe is a major agricultural and economic threat, it is not a pandemic.

Scientists and public health experts agree that we cannot stop an influenza pandemic, but we can control and limit disease and death through early detection and a well-planned response.

In Alaska, disease-monitoring systems are in place for detection of influenza. All laboratories

**‘There will be another influenza pandemic ... but no matter which virus it is or when it happens, our work is cut out for us.’**

—Richard Mandsager, M.D.

in Alaska report positive influenza tests to Public Health. The State Public Health Virology Laboratory cultures and identifies influenza viruses and is a member laboratory of the World Health Organization influenza surveillance network.

In addition to detection, response planning is underway. Several communities have hosted mass vaccination clinics — using regular flu shots — to test our ability to rapidly get drugs and vaccines into the mouths and arms of the people. The Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association is working

with hospitals to improve planning for medical care during a pandemic.

House Bill 95, a new public health emergencies and disasters bill passed by the Alaska Legislature, was signed into law by Gov. Frank Murkowski in June. This statute gives the state authority to contain the spread of contagious diseases using appropriate isolation and quarantine measures, but only if absolutely necessary.

These preparedness measures yield double dividends in that they also improve readiness for natural disasters or terrorist attacks.

We are better prepared for a pandemic than ever before, but we are not ready yet. We must expand and improve disaster response plans. We must be sure that we can get critical information to the medical community and to the public rapidly. We must assure that rural Alaskans have access to medications, vaccine and health care, despite the challenges of distance and weather. Communication systems between federal, state, tribal, and local agencies must work during an emergency.

One thing seems certain — there will be another influenza pandemic. It may not be the H5N1 avian strain that is so prominent in the news right now, but no matter which virus is the culprit or when it happens, our work is cut out for us.

*Editor’s note: a version of this article appeared in the Anchorage Daily News on Oct. 26, 2005, page B-6.*

## Ready to Read, Ready to Learn: First lady chairs child literacy task force to implement governor’s strategic plan

In collaboration with the Department of Education and Early Development, the Department of Health and Social Services and other public and private stakeholders are advancing a new task force to identify ways that Alaskans can improve the literacy of preschoolers.

First lady Nancy Murkowski chairs the newly designed Alaska Ready to Read, Ready to Learn Task Force.

“Our plan, outlined by the governor, calls for improving the readiness of preschoolers to read and learn, so families can become better at teaching children to listen, speak, read and write,” Mrs. Murkowski says. “The plan also calls for preschools and childcare centers to provide the best possible start for children, for the business community to do its part, and for state and local governments to support the new initiative’s totality.”

During a luncheon meeting in Anchorage Nov. 10, 2005, Mrs. Murkowski outlined the governor’s plan to include \$750,000 in his 2007 operating budget. “Our children are born ready to learn,” the first lady says. “We just need to be there for them at the right time to make sure they have every opportunity to realize their potential.”

Department of Health and Social Services Commissioner Karleen Jackson thanked the first lady at the November luncheon for her leadership and interest in the area of early childhood development, especially preschool opportunities for 3- and 4-year-olds. Jackson: “Those are the most critical years in a child’s vocabulary development, which impacts later success in reading and writing.”

The plan calls for developing and implementing the early learning strategic plan developed by the task force. Key components of the early childhood literacy initiative are early learning standards that align with kindergarten through 12th-grade performance standards, and quality standards for teachers and early care providers.

## DHSS Stars



### JAMES AGLOINGA

James Agloinga, a Juvenile Justice Officer III at the Nome Youth Facility, received the National Juvenile Detention Association Bob Rader Award in July 2005. Agloinga was also named Line Staff of the Year. The Rader Award recognizes the significance of line staff workers and detention services professionals on the lives of at-risk and delinquent youths. The award honors Robert B. Rader (1927-82), a juvenile detention administrator considered a pioneer in bringing a sense of humane care of youth to the detention setting.



Agloinga

### LAVON AUSMAN

Lavon Ausman, a Division of Juvenile Justice Nurse III at McLaughlin Youth Center, received the 2005 Bob Rader Detention Services Worker of the Year Award. The award was presented by the National Juvenile Detention Association.



Ausman

### DEBORAH ERICKSON

Deborah Erickson, Deputy Director of the Division of Public Health, received the 2005 Barbara Berger Excellence in Public Health Award. The award — announced Nov. 30, 2005, at the Alaska Health Summit — recognizes Erickson as a longtime champion of public health law reform. She chaired the national working group that wrote a model public health law for states and was instrumental in passage of a reform law in Alaska, House Bill 95.

Erickson also received the Martha Katz Outstanding Project Award at the National Public Health Leadership Institute for a presentation detailing the use of performance management in public health. The institute is a 12-month leadership development program funded by the Centers for Disease Control and offered through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The award was announced Nov. 5, 2005.



Erickson

### PAT LEEMAN

Pat Leeman, Bethel Youth Facility Superintendent, received national recognition from the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators for leading Alaska through the candidacy period of Performance-based Standards implementation in secure juvenile facilities across Alaska. Performance-based Standards is a data-driven and ongoing quality improvement and accountability system, sponsored by the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, for locked juvenile facilities.



Leeman

## Bring The Kids Home initiative makes steady progress

The road back to Alaska is long and twisting, but the Division of Behavioral Health is making progress in its efforts to “Bring The Kids Home” from Outside residential psychiatric treatment centers. The \$5 million two-year initiative was fully funded at \$2.5 million for fiscal year 2006 by the Legislature during the last session.



DHSS Commissioner Karleen Jackson, left, attends groundbreaking ceremonies for the Juneau Youth Services residential treatment facility. SEARHC president and CEO Ken Brewer speaks to crowd.

### Bringing more home

According to Pam Miller, who coordinates residential psychiatric treatment center development, recent accomplishments show that the program is working. At least 100 children with serious emotional disorders were returned to Alaska in fiscal year 2005, and the total number served in Outside treatment centers has dropped approximately 5 percent since fiscal year 2004. In recent years, more than 40 percent of youngsters in residential psychiatric treatment Outside are Alaska Native.

### New in-state treatment facilities

“At the same time use of out-of-state treatment is lessening, use of in-state facilities is increasing,” Health and Social Services Commissioner Karleen Jackson

said at the October groundbreaking for Juneau Youth Services’ new 15-bed residential facility. The JYS facility is a joint venture with SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium and will serve Alaska youth currently in out-of-state facilities. Located on JYS’s Montana Creek campus, the facility is scheduled to open in fall 2006.

Residential psychiatric treatment centers in the planning stages include NorthStar Behavioral Health System’s 60-bed and Southcentral Foundation’s 48-bed facilities. Southcentral’s center is planned for a 30-acre site in the Eklutna area, east of Anchorage, according to Fred Kopacz, Southcentral’s director of planning and grants. The center will emulate an Alaska Native village, with individual cottages arrayed around a central structure containing classrooms, vocational shops, recreation facilities, clinical rooms and administrative offices.

Funding for planning and design of these new structures came from the Denali Commission, which awarded Juneau Youth Services \$50,000 and Southcentral Foundation \$95,000. JYS will be receiving \$1.5 million in state funds for construction, and Southcentral is likely to receive up to \$1.25 million for construction if it is construction-ready by Sept. 30, 2007. NorthStar has not received direct financial support because it is a for-profit organization.

### Grants to build services in Alaska communities

The division has also recently awarded grants ranging from \$50,000

to \$125,000 to 11 Alaska nonprofits for pilot projects that serve youngsters who experience severe emotional and substance abuse disorders. The projects include crisis prevention and intervention services, in-home services, mental health respite and stabilization homes, and therapeutic group homes. The 10 grantees are Denali Family Services, Volunteers of America, Anchorage Community Mental Health Services and Southcentral Foundation, all of Anchorage; Juneau Youth Services; Fairbanks’ Family Centered Services of Alaska and Presbyterian Hospitality House; Wasilla’s Kid’s Are People, Inc.; Seward’s Seaview Community Services; and Ketchikan’s Community Connections.

### New positions to keep kids home

Three new positions — Utilization Review Specialists — have been created to serve the project by tracking admissions of youngsters to in-state residential psychiatric treatment centers and the state’s three acute care hospitals: Providence, NorthStar and Alaska Psychiatric Institute. These specialists will work with acute care facilities to identify youth who are likely to be recommended to out-of-state treatment centers. Their goal is to assist families and providers in the identification of community services that can meet the clinical needs of the family. These positions are necessary because acute care facilities sometimes make arrangements for out-of-state treatment of noncustodial Alaska kids without considering the availability of community resources.

### Bringing policies and regulations into line

The department is working on revising policies and regulations to better support the Bring The Kids Home initiative. A top priority is requiring out-of-state facilities to provide

individualized treatment that is closely monitored for progress, with a focus on discharge planning at the earliest time the youngster can be effectively treated in Alaska. Regulation rewrites are also underway for community behavioral health services, studying the rates for services in residential settings, making more beds available to children regardless of whose custody they are in, and allowing for schools to provide behavioral health services. “[But] regulation changes take a long time,” project manager Miller explained. Meanwhile policy rewrites are in the works, including updated residential psychiatric treatment center care criteria, policies on medical necessity and the plan of care, including the treatment planning process, and discharge planning, Miller said.

“In order to bring back — and keep — our kids in Alaska, we must have a comprehensive system of care for families and kids who need behavioral health services,” Miller said. “This ‘system of care’ includes intensive in-home services, therapeutic foster care homes, group homes and small residential facilities, as well as residential psychiatric treatment centers.”

### Looking toward fiscal year 2007

In October in Fairbanks, Gov. Frank Murkowski told the Alaska Federation of Natives convention that his proposed budget for fiscal year 2007 will include an increase of \$3.7 million for the Bring The Kids Home initiative. Among other things, the funding would support a project manager and group home development for start-up operating expenses.

Other needs that require funding are staffing for regional and out-of-state placement committees, which are partially funded through Medicaid; a community mental health center grant for care coordination of youth with serious emotional disorders; and work force development strategies.

## Office of Children’s Services’ online database system — ‘ORCA’ — wins award

### Case management database designed to help OCS workers

The Office of Children’s Services’ computer database — Online Resources for Children, known as ORCA — is so good, it has attracted national attention. Richard Varn, senior fellow at the Center for Digital Government, presented a prestigious award in August 2005 to CGI-AMS, the contractor on the ORCA system.

“The Center recognizes CGI-AMS and the state of Alaska for its transformational ORCA system,” Varn said. “We conducted a thorough nationwide review and the ORCA project stands as one of the finest examples of technology advancing a critical public service offering.”

After many years developing the system, the Office of Children’s Services began using ORCA on Sept. 7, 2004, as a new tool to help protect Alaska’s children.

From left, Senior Fellow with the Center for Digital Government Rich Varn; award recipient ORCA contractor Matt Hogan, Vice President of Consulting Services for the Human Services Group; and Mark Skinner, Director of Global Government Alliances, Intelligent Document Business Unit, Adobe Systems. Adobe sponsored the awards ceremony.



ORCA is a Web-based information system with a centralized database that OCS staff can access anywhere the state network is available.

“ORCA is a ‘case management’ system for child protection workers,” OCS Deputy Commissioner Tammy Sandoval explained, “as opposed to a ‘case tracking’ system, which is useful only to management. ORCA

actually helps front-line workers perform the real, hands-on work of protecting children.”

ORCA is now the state’s single, consolidated information system for child welfare activities, providing for the sharing of current and consistent data across the state.

ORCA provides Alaska’s 450 social workers with the ability to instantly share information on more than 10,000 child abuse and neglect cases that are investigated annually. Social workers can access case records in real time online through a system that supports child abuse, foster care, adoptions, and financial processing. Best practices in areas of risk assessment, placement, and payment processing are fully supported.

Case data contains information about not only the clients, but about the providers and others linked to the case. The database allows supervisors to obtain quick overviews of workers’ caseloads, and generates automatic task reminders for caseworkers.

## Family-to-Family: Keeping families together

After nearly two years in effect, the Office of Children's Services' Family-to-Family initiative continues to guide Children's Services in improving Alaska's child welfare system.

Family-to-Family — in collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and with the support of a Rasmuson Foundation grant — began in Alaska in February 2004. Family-to-Family is designed to better screen children being considered for removal from home, with the goal of preserving the family if that can be done safely, while assessing the needs of children.

Another goal is to keep children in their own neighborhood or with family members whenever possible if they do need to be moved from their home. Family-to-Family also involves foster families in family reunification efforts.

"OCS can't do this alone and needs the support of the community to help provide resources for children and families," staff manager Dara Lively says. The ultimate goal is to try to keep children safe in their own home, and if not their own home, with a permanent family that can keep them connected to their community and appropriate family ties, Lively adds.

### Family-to-Family Strategies

**Recruiting, training and support** of foster parents and relative caregivers. In Anchorage, a workgroup is currently focusing on how to recruit more Native foster homes due to the disproportionate number of Native children in foster care.

**Building community partnerships** brings community organizations together with the goal of creating an environment that supports families involved in the child welfare system.

**Team decision-making** involves foster parents, caseworkers, birth families and community members in placement decisions to ensure a network of support for the child and the adults who care for him or her. Current data suggest a significant decrease in the number of children being removed from the home and an increase of children being returned to the home sooner due to the team decision-making meetings.

**Self-evaluation** uses hard data linked to child and family outcomes to use in decision-making, and to show where change is needed and where progress has been made.



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Dept. of Health & Social Services  
Winter Update 2005-06  
Vol. 1 No. 2

A biannual publication printed on recycled paper.

# Alaska Partnership for Healthy Communities aims to improve coordination among programs

## Single point of contact for Alaskans in need

Alaskans in need often encounter a number of obstacles when trying to obtain services from government agencies. Many must deal with multiple case workers and programs that are uncoordinated and unaware of what the other is providing. Finding solutions to these problems is the goal of a new initiative that envisions a single point of contact for Alaskans seeking services.

The Alaska Partnership for Healthy Communities is an initiative to improve collaboration among government agencies and communities through projects that promote integrated services for Alaskans. The initiative is based on a broad, "umbrella" strategy that connects and guides a number of related projects, all designed to integrate health and social service delivery.

DHSS is taking the lead in implementing this initiative to improve collaboration among government agencies and communities through projects that promote integrated services for Alaskans.

### What does "integration" mean for people looking for services?

The integration of services addresses client needs in a coordinated manner. The goal is to make services as seamless and beneficial for clients as possible.

For example, a person or family may have as many as three different state case workers. These case workers may report to different agencies solely because the services and funds are uncoordinated. Through the integration of these services, a single point of contact would be created to help clients avoid having to deal with multiple programs that are uncoordinated and unaware of what the other is providing.

### Current projects

Current projects include:

- Integrated Services for Children and Families in the Mat-Su and Fairbanks regions
- Behavioral Health Integration Project
- Statewide Behavioral Health Community Planning Project

- Family to Family Project in the Anchorage area
- Master Client Index
- Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems

A Web site has been launched with information about the Partnership for Healthy Communities at [aphc.alaska.gov](http://aphc.alaska.gov). The Web site contains fact sheets and a video presentation that describe the efforts and overall vision in more detail.

### Action plans in works

In late October, Department of Health and Social Services staff and partners gathered at a one-day event called Partnership Day. More than a hundred attendees listened to speakers, attended breakout sessions and created action plans. Keynote speakers from Outside shared their experiences with integration and helped attendees brainstorm future efforts and make individual contributions.

Many DHSS divisions are involved in integration efforts, and the department's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives will be providing support for these efforts in the future.

## Advisory team seeks to curb homelessness in Alaska

While Alaska is well-known for its bitterly cold temperatures and inhospitable climate, many residents don't know that thousands of homeless Alaskans fight a daily struggle to survive.

According to a draft report by the Governor's Council on the Homeless, the costs of homelessness in Alaska in human suffering and economic impact are staggering. Putting an end to these costs is the main reason behind a recent partnership between state and local policy-makers called the Homelessness Ends in Alaska – Advisory Team, known by its acronym HEA-AT.

The goal of the team is to develop a series of strategies and action plans that can be used by policy-makers and the Governor's Council on the Homeless to help direct resources to those who need help most.

Alaska was one of eight states recently selected to have representatives attend a federally sponsored "policy academy" designed to help state and local policy-makers improve access to mainstream services for families.

Alaska's team was made up of 15 state and local policy-makers whose goals were to work together through a process of strategic decision-making and develop an action plan to battle severe social issues such as homelessness.

"Our goal is to bring together the many agencies that provide services to address homelessness and find a common ground where we can truly make a difference in people's lives,"



Alaska's long winters make homelessness even more threatening to individual lives, and to the communities where homelessness exists.

team member Stephanie Wheeler said. Wheeler is Executive Director of the state of Alaska's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. She emphasized that strengthening partnerships among faith-based groups, government agencies and community organizations will best serve those in need.

The Governor's Council on the Homeless draft report lists strategies to reduce homelessness in Alaska. According to the report, an estimated 14,000 Alaskans experience homelessness at some point each year. Additionally, families with children are

the fastest growing segment of the homeless population — and incidents of family homelessness have increased every year since 1985. The leading causes of homelessness are rooted in poverty, a lack of affordable housing, domestic violence and a lack of health care insurance.

The Homelessness Ends in Alaska – Advisory Team has identified four main goals on which it will base its planning, policy-making and setting of performance standards:

- Promote locally delivered collaborative family centered services
- Increase collaboration and coordination with partners to end homelessness
- Increase safe and affordable housing stock
- Integrate homeless planning efforts across Alaska

In the months ahead, the advisory team will work to include its recommendations in the Governor's Council on the Homeless state plan. Team members will identify other related groups and planning efforts where they can work together to achieve the common goal of reducing homelessness in Alaska.

This publication was produced by the Department of Health & Social Services. It was printed at a cost of \$.80 per copy in Juneau, Alaska. This cost block is required by AS 44.99.210

# WINTER UPDATE 2005-06



Alaska Department of Health & Social Services  
Office of the Commissioner  
P.O. Box 110601  
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0601

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## Inside:

- **OCS online system wins award**
- **Bring The Kids Home makes progress**
- **DHSS leadership changes**
- **Meet our DHSS “stars”**

## Practice response to disasters requires agency cooperation

### *Exercises with partners prepare DHSS staff to deal with variety of emergencies*

— Terrorists launch bioterror attacks following Alaska natural disasters.

— Across Alaska terrorists disrupt life and cause harm to Alaskans after multiple earthquakes and flooding wreaked havoc in Anchorage and Juneau before spreading to many other communities.

— DHSS responds and partners with others during Alaska Shield/Northern Edge exercise.

**T**hat was the complex scenario and how the events unfolded during the Alaska Shield/Northern Edge 2005 exercise Aug. 15-19, 2005.

Prior to 2005, the Department of Defense conducted the Northern Edge exercise mainly for training military troops in homeland defense operations. But this year's drill also included civilians from state, local and federal agencies, along with the military, to

combat and respond to a series of catastrophic events, both natural and manmade.

The exercise began after two massive, simulated earthquakes struck Juneau and Anchorage, prompting the Federal Emergency Management Agency to create a Joint Field Office in Anchorage.

During the next five days, a wide range of simulated natural disasters and terrorist events occurred in 21 Alaska communities from Barrow to Ketchikan, designed to challenge and train civilian and military responders while testing organization and integration skills at all government levels. Other scenarios included a cargo aircraft crash in Anchorage, infectious disease outbreaks among passengers aboard a state ferry, and contaminated water in Southcentral Alaska.

Alaska Department of Health and Social Services personnel sprang into action with the state's Emergency Response Plan and the Alaska Public Health Emergency Operations Plan. They united with partners from various agencies, including the Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, Alaska State Troopers, Alaska National Guard, Alaska State Defense Force, and many others at the State Emergency Coordination Center on Fort Richardson in Anchorage.

“An exercise of this degree afforded all of the parties an opportunity to gather resources, knowledge and expertise to work together to achieve the goals of preparedness and response to various emergency situations and protection of all people in Alaska,” Public Health Division Director Dr. Richard Mandsager said.



The Municipality of Anchorage participated in Alaska Shield/Northern Edge 2005 by holding a mass casualty exercise simulating a plane crash with hazardous materials at Kincaid Park. (Photo courtesy of Tech. Sgt. Roger M. Dey, U.S. Air Force.)



The City of Ketchikan was the focal point of a major anthrax attack exercise during Alaska Shield/Northern Edge 2005. (Photo courtesy of the City of Ketchikan.)

Deputy Director of the Division of Public Health Deb Erickson served as the Public Health virtual EOC Incident Commander, overseeing the division's plans and coordinating response activities; managing resources; and facilitating the public health division's role in each scenario.

“Our team was certainly put to the test during the exercise,” Erickson said. “While serving as the incident commander, I was fortunate to work with highly skilled and well-trained public health professionals and others from various state departments in a coordinated and successful response.”

Approximately 5,000 people participated in this year's Alaska Shield/Northern Edge, slated to occur every two years.