

WINTER UPDATE 2008-09

PROMOTING AND PROTECTING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ALASKANS

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 1

State ‘brings — and keeps — kids home’

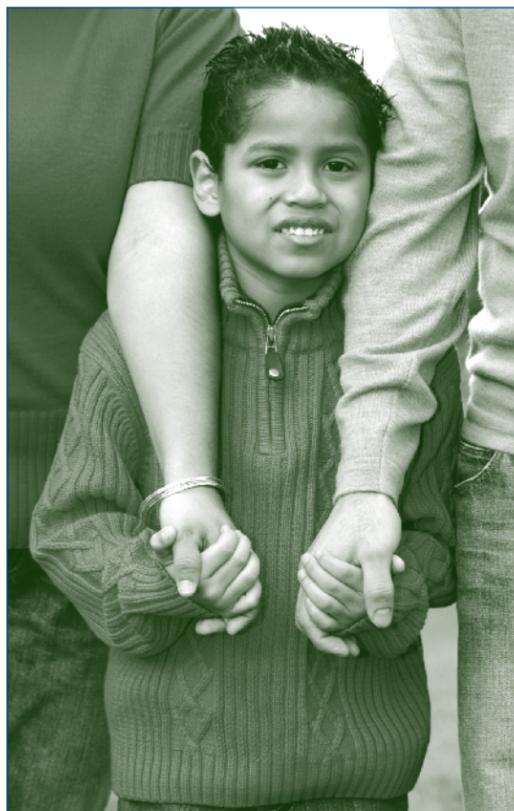
The Bring the Kids Home Initiative is now in its fourth year, and the project’s goal — treating Alaska’s youth with serious emotional disturbances close to, or in their own homes and communities — is steadily being realized. “The funding and planning partnership with the Mental Health Trust Authority and the Alaska Planning boards has been key,” Project Coordinator Brita Bishop said. “And we’ve had great involvement from parent advocates, tribes and providers.”

The new general funds approved by the Legislature for the initiative this session (and last) has allowed the state to begin to address system gaps, make changes to policies and regulations, and engage in active management of residential care. Providers and community partners have developed their own strategies — cooperative service planning, new partnerships — to develop services for difficult-to-serve children and their families. Workforce development activities are going on with help from the University of Alaska and a work group. “There has just been a huge amount of effort by a lot of dedicated people,” Bishop said.

New grants

Between fiscal year 2006 and fiscal year 2008, 38 Bring the Kids Home operating grants were awarded, which developed services in 13 Alaska communities (and statewide). More than 56 new beds were developed

in small residential, group or foster homes. Over 1,000 children were served — hundreds of these children



were diverted from moving into residential care (in- or out-of-state) or assisted to return to their homes and communities from residential care.

Care coordination

A new care coordination team within Health and Social Services is monitoring referrals to out-of-state Residential Psychiatric Treatment Centers (RPTC) care, ensuring use of in-state resources prior to out-of-state RPTC care and engaging in system development through community “Bring The Kids Home” summits held across the state. A pilot project by this team to divert non-custody children in acute care from out-of-state RPTC care was able to divert approximately 37 children during fiscal year 2007 and 41 children during fiscal year 2008.

Parent navigation grant

A \$290,000 Bring the Kids Home grant was awarded to Alaska Youth and Family Network for fiscal year 2008 — the Alaska Chapter of the National Federal of Families for Children’s Mental Health — to expand parent navigation services and training.

AYFN is a nonprofit organization that advocates for families and children with social, emotional and/or behavioral challenges and related disabilities. The

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Affiliated Computer Services assumes all Medicaid provider services for state

On Nov. 1, 2008, Affiliated Computer Services — a national leader in state health-care program administration — assumed all fiscal agent services supporting Medicaid Management Information System for Health and Social Services.

The \$27 million contract allows Affiliated Computer Services to take over operating Alaska’s Medicaid management from First Health Services Corporation. First Health is a Virginia-based company that had been running Alaska’s MMIS since 1987.

Affiliated Computer Services now administers claims processing, recipient helpline, pharmacy drug rebate and retrospective drug utilization review, system enhancement, electronic data interchange support, pharmacy help desk, and preferred drug list services.

Innovative Web-enabled system

In September 2007 Health and Social Services contracted

with Affiliated Computer Services to design, develop, implement and operate a new MMIS system which is called Alaska Medicaid Health Enterprise. As part of the contract, the company will provide Alaska with the most innovative, sophisticated, Web-enabled Medicaid system in the health-care market today.

“For providers, the new system will offer many new options for submitting and correcting claims and will also allow for electronic payments directly into their bank account,” said Bill Streur, deputy commissioner for Alaska’s Medicaid and Health Care Policy. “Recipients will be able to access the secure Web site 24 hours a day to find providers and verify eligibility.”

Alaska Medicaid Health Enterprise is slated for implementation summer 2010.

Visit <http://www.alaskamedicaid.info> for Medicaid Management Information System project updates.

New API board 'consumer-driven'

The Alaska Psychiatric Institute has formed a new advisory board with a unique feature: at least seven seats are held by people who have used the state's mental health services.

The new board will focus on patient rights and responsibilities, as well as continuing the transformation of the hospital to a recovery-based organization. "To accomplish this, we need — at the table — the very people we serve," API Chief Executive Officer Ron Adler said.

Andrea Schmook, a consumer-seat member of the new board, is a long-time mental health advocate in Anchorage. "It's the people who have used your service who are the best ones to tell you what works, what needs to be changed, and maybe what you need to stop doing," Schmook said.

Governor Sarah Palin established API's new advisory board, within the office of the commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services, through Administrative Order No. 241 on July 1, 2008. The order also dissolved the facility's former governing body, in place since 1988.

The new board is different in purpose and intent. "The recent shift in focus is intended to support the department's Division of Behavioral Health and hospital leadership team in the continuing transformation of API to a recovery-based organization," Adler said. "Who else could better serve as experts on recovery from mental illness than primary consumers of services?" he asked.

The board is specifically 'consumer-driven,' with a number of board seats available to consumers and the local Protection & Advocacy agency. "In reality, there will be more than seven consumer seats because some of the other representatives who are consumers of mental health services wish to remain anonymous," Adler said.

Serving on the 11-member API advisory board requires a commitment of time and energy, including attending at least four meetings a year and serving on subcommittees.

While the Advisory Board has currently filled its seats, those interested in serving in the future may contact Adler at (907) 269-7106, or by e-mail, ron.adler@alaska.gov.

Increasing access to safe, affordable child care is goal

The Division of Public Assistance is working to increase the effectiveness of its child care assistance program by evaluating quality and availability of provider services, along with more equitable subsidy rates.

The division's mission is to promote self-sufficiency and provide for basic living expenses to Alaskans in need. Safe and affordable, quality child care is a key component in helping to ensure that families can work and move toward economic self-sufficiency.

While the division was gratified that the Legislature approved its fiscal year 2009 request for \$2.7 million to increase the child care provider subsidy rate, this was an initial step in closing the gap between the state rate and the amount providers charge for care.

The new rate, which was effective Sept. 1, 2008, brings child care assistance subsidy rates in line with the 50th percentile of the 2007 Child Care Market Rate Survey. "Previously, child care rates had not been increased statewide since 2001," Acting Child Care Program Manager Marcey Bish said. "The federal government suggests that states set rates at the 75th percentile of market rates to ensure equal access to child care for families receiving child care assistance."

The Child Care Program Office maintains that the subsidy rate setting is complex and that factors other than the "rates providers are charging" must be used to inform decision

making. Currently, the office is reviewing the provider subsidy rates as part of a department-wide initiative to develop a uniform rate-setting methodology for services such as child care and assisted living care for elderly Alaskans.

In addition, the next Child Care Market Survey is under way. "We are very excited about this survey," Bish said. "We've worked hard to engage providers and partners in the early care and education field in the development of the survey and are hopeful that this survey and future surveys will allow providers to respond with more in-depth information regarding cost of operations and quality initiatives, rather than just a pricing summary."

The most recent completed survey (July 2007) was sent to the 633 statewide providers licensed to provide child care. Of those providers, 432 participated in the survey, a 68-percent response rate. Those respondents served 8,240 children; 45 percent, or 3,251, were children whose families received some kind of assistance for child care. Of the total children in care, 32 percent received child care assistance from the state Division of Public Assistance; 3 percent from the state Office of Children's Services; 2 percent from a tribal organization; and 3 percent from other sources.

To view the complete results of the 2007 Child Care Market Rate Survey, go to <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/programs/ccare/files/AkChildCareMarketRateSurvey2007.pdf>.

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organization's goals include helping Alaska families and youths coordinate their voices as equal partners with professionals on issues related to wellness, resiliency and behavioral health.

Parent navigation uses trained professional parents — with experience navigating the service system for their own children's behavioral health needs — to provide support and assistance to parents with children with severe behavioral needs. The two-year grant will continue during fiscal years 2008 and 2009. Between March and September 2007, 55 youth referred to residential psychiatric treatment centers for care were served. Of these, 45 percent were able to remain in community settings. Another 34 percent moved into in-state residential settings. In total, 79 percent were maintained in-state.

During fiscal year 2007, AYFN also had a \$60,000 grant to work with children in acute care who were referred to out-of-state RPTC services.

"The time, energy and resources that have been invested are reflected in the project indicators," Bishop said. "We're starting to make progress at building the in-state systems and services to keep kids in their homes and communities — it's very encouraging."

See the "Bring the Kids Home 3-Year Update" for fiscal years 2005–07 for

more details: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/commissioner/btkh/pdf/3yearupdate.pdf>.

More information on Bring the Kids Home can be found in "Bringing (and Keeping) the Kids Home 5-Year Plan, 2009–13":

http://www.hss.state.ak.us/commissioner/btkh/pdf/2007_5yearplan.pdf.

Medicare expenditures shift

Between state fiscal years 1998 and 2004, out-of-state RPTC Medicaid expenditures experienced an average annual increase of 59.2 percent and an overall increase of over 1,300 percent. However, between fiscal years 2006 and 2007, Medicaid expenditures for out-of-state residential psychiatric treatment care decreased by 8.16 percent as fewer children accessed out-of-state care, and between fiscal years 2007 and 2008, there was a further decrease of 27 percent in the expenditures for out-of-state residential psychiatric treatment care.

Between fiscal years 2006 and 2007, Medicaid expenditures for in-state residential psychiatric treatment centers increased by 46.1 percent to reflect expanded capacity in-state, and between fiscal years 2007 and 2008, in-state expenditures remained essentially at 2007 levels. Between fiscal years 2007 and 2008, total RPTC Medicaid expenditures (for both in-state and out-of-state care) decreased by 17 percent.

Rising vaccine costs curtail free distribution

As of Jan. 1, 2009, the Division of Public Health was forced to revise its vaccine policy restricting the free supply of two vaccines.

Gardasil®, the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine designed to prevent some cervical cancers in girls, and Menactra®, a vaccine for both boys and girls to prevent meningitis, will now only be free to children age 18 or younger who are eligible for Medicaid; Alaska Native or American Indian; uninsured; or underinsured and receiving services at a federally qualified health center.

Since June of 2007 the state has distributed nearly 33,000 doses of Gardasil®, enough to vaccinate 11,000 girls. Just over 36,000 doses of Menactra® have been distributed since January of 2006. Officials with the Alaska Immunization Program estimate that the change in funding will impact approximately 4,000 girls' ability to receive the HPV vaccine and 5,500 teens' ability to receive the meningitis vaccine.

For questions about the Alaska Immunization Program, contact Public Health at (907) 269-8000 or 1-888-430-4321. More information can be found at http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/bulletins/docs/b2008_21.pdf.

Leadership changes in department

Health and Social Services Commissioner Bill Hogan made four recent appointments to the leadership of the department. Alison Elgee was named Assistant Commissioner for Finance Management Services, and Patrick Hefley was named Deputy Commissioner of Family, Community and Integrated Services. Both are based in Juneau.

“We are excited to have two people with combined experience in state government and the private sector joining our team,” Commissioner Hogan said. “I am confident that their individual strengths will help us achieve our mission ‘to promote and protect the health and well-being of Alaskans.’”



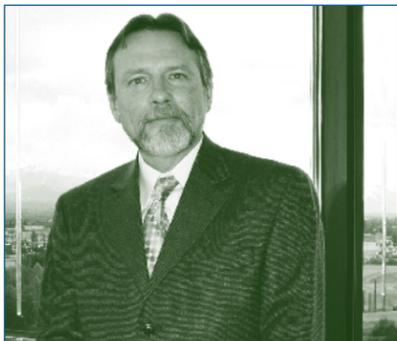
Elgee

Elgee has extensive experience in Alaska, serving for eight years as the Deputy Commissioner of the state Department of Administration. She also coordinated the budget development and process for the University of Alaska as the Director of Budget.

Elgee’s private sector experience includes work as a business consultant specializing in government affairs, public finance and long-term care. Before assuming her current position, she was a legislative aide to Rep. Reggie Joule. She holds a bachelor’s degree in business from the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho. She began work as Assistant Commissioner on Sept. 22, 2008.

As Assistant Commissioner, Elgee oversees all functions and activities related to budget, fiscal, revenue, information technology, facilities, administrative services, and grants and contracts.

Patrick Hefley assumed his position as Deputy Commissioner on Nov. 3, 2008. Before joining the state, he worked for nearly two decades as the Director of the Behavioral Health Services Division for the SouthEast Regional Health Consortium. Hefley has also served as the Director of Health and Social Services for the Kodiak Area Native Association



Hefley

and the director of Community Health Services for the Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation. He holds a bachelor’s degree in counseling and a master’s degree in Public Health in Community Health Education from the University of Missouri in Columbia, Mo.

As Deputy Commissioner of Family, Community, and Integrated Services, Hefley is responsible for providing primary oversight to several divisions within the department. They include the Pioneer Homes, Public Assistance, Behavioral Health, Senior and Disabilities Services, Juvenile Justice and the Office of Children’s Services, as well as the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In addition, he has the responsibility for developing and implementing business processes and providing senior management with direction and support.

New division directors named



Hilgendorf

Rebecca Hilgendorf was named Director of the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, and David Cote was named Director of Alaska Pioneer Homes, both effective in December.

Hilgendorf has broad professional experience in the fields of mental health, geriatrics, physical and developmental disabilities, and complex medical conditions.

She began her career with Health and Social Services 26 years ago and has served Alaskans across the state from a variety of positions based in Palmer, Wasilla, Fairbanks and Anchorage.

Hilgendorf currently serves as a commissioner on the Commission on Aging and is a licensed Nursing Home Administrator. She holds a bachelor of science degree in therapeutic recreation from the University of Florida and has completed all but the thesis required to obtain a master’s degree in special education through the University of Alaska.

As director, Hilgendorf is responsible for providing leadership and primary oversight to Home and Community Based Waiver and Grant services; Personal Care Assistance; Adult Protective Services; Quality Assurance; Aging and Disability Resource Centers; and the Senior Information Office. She is based in Anchorage.



Cote

Before becoming director of Alaska Pioneer Homes, Cote was project coordinator for the division. In that capacity he served as the division’s legislative liaison, liaison with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, point person for Medicare Part D, Medicaid, and special projects.

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Sarah Palin
Governor



Setting priorities

From our elders to our infants, Health and Social Services is striving to improve and maintain the health and well-being of all Alaskans.

We have seen the formation of the Alaska Health Care Commission, established to address the quality, accessibility, and availability of health care.

We are calling for an expansion of health coverage for youngsters through Denali KidCare, enabling more kids to stay healthy and strong. We are promoting healthier lifestyle choices to reverse the upward trend of childhood obesity, and we have set out to expand the diagnosis of autism which will support earlier intervention and treatment options. These are just some examples of our unified effort to keep our kids healthy and best position them for success in school — and in life.

As we welcome the New Year, let’s continue to work together to live well and stay healthy.

Bill Hogan
Commissioner



Not just words

Please look at the top of page 2 and contemplate the words that have appeared in every Update issue for the past several years: ‘Kids ... Families ... Community.’ That’s what our Alaska Department of Health and Social Services has been and will always be about.

As the stories in this issue of Winter Update 2008–09 highlight, we take pride in our successes in helping individuals and families create safe and healthy communities.

Read about our partnerships aimed at reducing the need for foster homes, our success in lowering the smoking rate, and the state Public Health Lab’s new test that saves lives in poisoning cases. Share our pride in the Palmer Veterans and Pioneers Home being named “Best in the Valley.” Read about our efforts to increase the rates for child care providers, and the creation of a new Alaska Psychiatric Institute Advisory Board designed to get meaningful input from consumers.

While we remain focused on our mission “to promote and protect the health and well-being of Alaskans,” our actions speak louder than our words.

Looking ahead strategically a decade or more

The Department of Health and Social Services leadership team is working on a Strategic Plan to guide the department through this decade and into the next. “We cannot reach our goals unless they are well-defined and measurable, with strategies in place,” Commissioner Bill Hogan said.

The department’s goals flow from its vision: “All individuals and families are healthy, safe and productive,” and its mission: “To promote and protect the health and well-being of Alaskans.”

The vision and mission are framed by a new set of values established after seeking feedback from department

staff and management. Collaboration, accountability, respect, empowerment and safety (C.A.R.E.S.) stood out as the most commonly shared values across divisions, and will become shared beliefs that guide our everyday business. The goals are aligned with the established priorities:

Substance Abuse

- Decrease the negative impacts of alcohol and substance abuse in Alaska.

Health and Wellness

- Improve the health status of Alaskans.

Health Care Reform

- Improve access to quality health care in Alaska.

Long Term Care

- Increase the percentage of adults 65 and older living independently in Alaska.

Vulnerable Populations

- Increase the percentage of at-risk individuals who are able to live safely in their homes in Alaska.

The objectives and measures for reaching the goals were being finalized at the time this publication went to print. Look for more details on strategic planning in Summer Update 2009.

Juvenile Justice plans facility renovations, expansion, increased staff

Upgrades are for safety and security reasons

The Division of Juvenile Justice plans to upgrade its facilities and expand its staff over the next several years, in support of its mission to help offenders develop skills to prevent crime.

The plan to upgrade facilities is “all about keeping kids safe and secure so we can serve them better,” Division Director Steve McComb said.

Six-year capital projects plan

The division’s eight juvenile facilities provide detention services; four of these eight also provide treatment services. Youth in detention are those awaiting court action or another outcome on their cases; youth in treatment are those who have been committed to longer-term secure care after adjudication. Every year, about 2,000 youth are admitted for detention, some more than once. An average of 134 youths are admitted for treatment annually.



More than 100 staff, former staff and partners celebrated McLaughlin Youth Center’s 40th anniversary in July. The ‘George M. McLaughlin Youth Center’ opened in July 1968 with 25 beds. The state’s biggest juvenile detention center now has 165 beds. George McLaughlin was an Anchorage lawyer who served on the Territorial Board of Juvenile Institutions. McLaughlin died in 1958 at age 44.

The six-year plan to renovate and improve the four oldest of the division’s eight youth facilities — Anchorage’s McLaughlin Youth Center, Juneau’s Johnson Youth Center, Fairbanks Youth Facility, and Bethel Youth facility — will cost approximately \$170 million spread over several phases.

Funding for Phase I of renovations at the 40-year-old McLaughlin facility was approved with the passage of the fiscal year 2009 budget. Improvements will include building new and

expanding existing detention units. An undersized and unsafe medical suite will be expanded and improved as well. McLaughlin’s current medical suite is 300 square feet, too small for the four nurses stationed there and the large number of residents, staff and medical professionals who use the space, McComb explained.

Renovations to McLaughlin and the other facilities in the plan are recommended to occur in phases through 2016. Johnson Youth Center’s detention unit will be renovated and expanded, a probation office will be remodeled and perimeter fencing will be added. Plans for the Bethel facility include construction of a 16-bed detention unit addition, and expanding space for classrooms and a gym. Fairbanks will get a 20-bed treatment unit, a new outdoor recreation area, and other renovations. All of the renovation plans will correct or reduce problems caused by the current layouts of the facilities. For example, current layouts often don’t allow staff to adequately keep an eye on all the residents’ cells from work stations.

10-year staffing plan

A staffing increase at several facilities over a 10-year period is designed to ensure the safety and security of the youth within the institutions, McComb said. Several of Alaska’s juvenile facilities lack sufficient staffing to meet national recommendations to ensure the proper safety, security, and habilitation of youth. The 10-year staffing plan to bring Alaska into alignment with good practice began in fiscal year 2008 when Juvenile Justice received funding to hire seven juvenile justice officers at three facilities and continued in fiscal year 2009 when the division received funding to hire eight positions at four facilities.

Youth suicide problem gets federal help

Alaska’s Division of Behavioral Health has received a \$1.5 million grant to combat youth suicide over the next three years. “The suicide rate among our young people is unacceptable,” Behavioral Health Director Melissa Witzler Stone said. “This grant gives us more to offer to communities facing the highest risk of youth suicide.”

Alaska youth age 15–24 committed suicide at three times the national average in 2005: nearly 30 deaths per 100,000 people. With the help of the grant, the state aims to build regional networks of trained teams that can identify those things in a community that stress local youth, and those that strengthen and protect them.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant, through the

Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, allots \$500,000 per year, depending on funding availability and grantees’ progress. Alaska will target youth age 14–24 with the grant, said L. Diane Casto, manager of Prevention and Early Intervention Services for Behavioral Health.

Casto said the division will work with numerous partners, including school districts, the Alaska

Native Tribal Health Consortium, the Statewide Suicide Prevention Council, the state Division of Public Health, the Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, the Alaska Mental Health Board and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

Each year, more children and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, and chronic lung diseases combined, said SAMHSA Acting Administrator Eric Broderick.

Each year, more children and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, and chronic lung diseases combined.

LEADERSHIP continued from page 3

Cote has over 20 years of active and reserve service in the U.S. Coast Guard. He has also worked for the state of Alaska as a social services program coordinator and officer, and as an accountant and accounting supervisor. He earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Northeastern University in Boston.

Cote will oversee the state’s six pioneer homes, located in Anchorage, Palmer, Sitka, Ketchikan, Fairbanks and Juneau. He is based in Juneau.

Other leadership appointments

Other leadership changes include Clay Butcher, who has primary responsibility for Public Information, and Wilda Laughlin, who is the legislative liaison for Health and Social Services. Butcher has worked in the Office of the Governor, served as the department webmaster, and most recently served as a Public Information Officer III within the DHSS Public Information section. He holds a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Maryland. Butcher is based in Anchorage. Laughlin has worked for 12 years as either a legislative aide or as an Information Officer for the Senate. She holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Laughlin is based in Juneau.

News Briefs

Lab team wins award

The Alaska State Public Health Lab is now the only laboratory in the state that can perform life-saving blood tests within hours to determine if antifreeze, wood alcohol or rubbing alcohol have been ingested. Knowing which deadly substance is involved determines the course of treatment.

For its achievement the staff that developed the tests received the Governor's Denali Peak Award for Outstanding Customer Service Team in 2008.

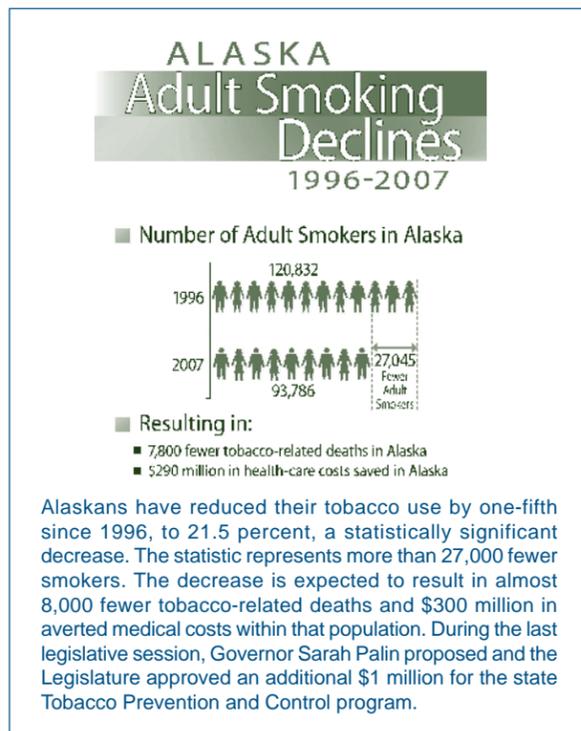
State health lab scientists David Verbrugge and Eileen Nickoloff developed the technique, which allows doctors to know quickly and decisively what the patient has ingested. The team — their boss calls them "Toxic Avengers" —

has already saved an estimated \$250,000 in unnecessary treatments and, more important, helped save Alaska lives.

"Almost 50 times each year, someone is hospitalized after drinking these chemicals; either accidentally or in an attempt to get high," lead chemist David Verbrugge said. "Getting an award is nice, but saving lives is better."

According to doctors at Providence Alaska Medical Center, in one poisoning case the quick antifreeze test result saved the patient a couple of days in ICU care. In another case, knowing which substance was involved helped save the patient's kidneys. Alaska Poison Control staff are excited that the group is able to provide these services 24/7.

Tobacco use down



DHSS Stars



SVEN PEARSON

Capital City Fire Rescue Volunteers named Sven Pearson Alaska's Firefighter of the Year. Pearson is a micro-network technician with IT in Juneau. Pearson was honored at the joint Alaska State Firefighters Association and Alaska Fire Chiefs Association annual awards banquet with a plaque presented by the State Fire Marshal Dave Tyler. Pearson currently serves as a volunteer lieutenant out of the Auke Bay Station. He has been active with the Fire Prevention Division in public education and fire investigations.



BARBARA HENJUM

Barbara Henjum, superintendent of the Division of Juvenile Justice's McLaughlin Youth Center in Anchorage, was elected Western Region Vice President of the National Juvenile Detention Association. Henjum's term is two years. "I am excited to be involved in juvenile justice issues at the national level and will contribute in any way I can," Henjum said.



CHARLOTTE M. DAVIS

Charlotte Davis completed a two-year Nurse Practitioner course through distance delivery while continuing her full-time job as Nurse III and Education Coordinator at the Fairbanks Pioneer Home. She performed her clinical practice in the community of Fairbanks.



ROSE SANDHOFFER

Rose Sandhofer, Social Worker II with the Office of Children's Services, has been with OCS for more than 10 years. Since moving into her current position as Adoptions Worker in January 2008, she has aided in finalizing more than 120 adoptions and several guardianships. Her biggest achievement, according to her supervisor Gail Stadig, is completing 29 adoptions on Adoption Day 2008. "Rose's tireless efforts on the Heart Gallery have contributed to children obtaining their forever homes," Stadig said.



MARY GRAY

Kodiak Office of Children's Services Supervisor Mary Gray temporarily stepped up as staff manager at the Bethel OCS office and competently performed both jobs for eight months. During her time as acting staff manager, the Bethel office was chosen for site review by the federal Child and Family Services Review. Throughout her extended period doing two jobs, Gray maintained high morale in both offices.



BERNADEAN ANSELM

RN III Bernadean Anselm, Education and Quality Assurance Coordinator at Ketchikan Pioneer Home, was honored for her outstanding efforts in preparing the Fire and Disaster Response Plan for the Alaska Veterans and Pioneers Home in Palmer. She worked with the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNA), state and local officials to comply with federal guidelines for continuity of operations and emergency response plans. Anselm is also an active member of a Borough-wide Special Needs Sheltering team that strives to meet sheltering needs of vulnerable residents in the event of a disaster.



SANDRA WOODS

Nurse Consultant II Sandra Woods, with the Division of Public Health, received her board certification in nursing professional development through the American Nurses Credentialing Center. The certification, which is good for five years, is awarded after completing a minimum of 4,000 hours of clinical practice in the field along with 30 hours of continuing education and passing an extensive three-hour exam.



DJJ STAFF

Division of Juvenile Justice Director Steve McComb's staff take seriously the overriding theme for the future direction of Health and Social Services: "helping individuals and families create safe and healthy communities." More than 100 DJJ staff members statewide volunteer actively at more than 100 organizations in their communities, from Boy Scouts, Little League, Boys and Girls Clubs, church and sports groups, drug prevention organizations, Big Sister and Big Brother — to Arts Councils, volunteer EMTs and Search and Rescue.



Churches, state collaborate to bridge gaps in foster care system

FLAME: Faith-Led Alliance to Maintain & Empower tackles overwhelming need

A group of Southcentral Alaska pastors, together with the state Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and its advisory council, are working to alleviate strains on Alaska foster families.

On any given day, the Office of Children's Services has approximately 2,000 children in state custody. Approximately 1,600 of those in care are in out-of-home placements. Scott Merriner, a pastor of ChangePoint in Anchorage and co-chair with Lt. Gov. Sean Parnell of the FBCI advisory council, said "the need for healthy, well-supported foster care homes quickly hit our radar screen as we talked about big issues Alaska wrestles with."

A workgroup comprised of state, private, nonprofit and faith-based professionals convened in 2007 to examine specific barriers hindering the success and growth in the number of foster families across our state. The group's name is FLAME (Faith-Led

Alliance to Maintain & Empower Foster & Resource Families).

What has been done?

In the past year, FLAME has identified specific needs, researched successful models, identified a best-fit solution for Alaska and garnered the support of committed congregations to continue efforts towards implementation.

Travis Erickson, Children's Services Manager for the Office of Children's Services and a member of FLAME, said "This has been a synergistic process — gathering representatives from many Anchorage churches — working together to craft a quality product, that the state and faith community can support." Erickson said he hopes to see concrete results within a year to two years. A solution will not be simple, involving as it must certification and licensing, training of foster parents, and designating OCS staff to work specifically with foster parents.



FLAME Vision

- Every foster child matched with a healthy, well supported foster family

FLAME Goals

- Increase retention of faith-inspired foster families by 50 percent
- Recruit 200 new faith-inspired foster families by 2012
- Reduce the workload for Office of Children's Services staff

In October, FLAME presented the following recommendations to a gathering of Alaska policy makers:

- Dedicate Office of Children's Services (OCS) staff to working with faith-based organizations
- Pass "hold-harmless" legislation that protects faith-based organizations that support foster care efforts
- Ensure OCS policies and procedures encourage the recruitment, training, and retention of faith-inspired resource families
- Support the development of faith-inspired foster care agencies

Next Steps

In early 2009, members of a pastoral advisory team and FLAME will begin the development of a timeline and detailed plan for launching a faith-inspired foster care agency in Anchorage.

ORCA: More detailed reports help Children's Services caseload management

The Office of Children's Services' ORCA (Online Resources for the Children of Alaska) data management system is now generating more detailed reports to help supervisors better manage staff and caseload.

For example, the Investigation Bank Report tracks three numbers: how many investigations took place that month; how many cases were closed; and the number that remained open.

The report gives managers the kind of comprehensive data they've never had before. Not only can they see at a glance how many cases each worker is carrying, they've learned that despite a long-held belief that Alaska workers typically had larger caseloads than national guidelines, Alaska's caseloads are actually very consistent with recommendations.

"For the first time in a long time, we're actually below the CWLA (Child Welfare League of America) standard of 12 per month," ORCA Project Manager Mike Matthews said. Since workers are obviously working very hard, Matthews said eliminating caseload size as a factor means that perhaps supervisors can help their staffs develop ways of identifying a more accurate understanding of the causes of worker overload.

Several more reports are in development and several are already available, such as a report that tracks trial home visits, and can be a reminder to staff to reevaluate cases. All the reports are available to any worker with access to ORCA.

Training expands for new Children's Services staff

An allocation from the Alaska Legislature in 2008 has enabled the Office of Children's Services to improve and expand training for both new employees and supervisors.

A portion of the funds is being used to add two additional weeks to the current two-week "TONE" (Training and Orientation for New Employees) curriculum for new front-line workers. The expanded training began in January 2009 and was officially renamed "Standards, Knowledge and Insight Leading to Success," SKILS.

Under the new schedule, workers will attend SKILS for two weeks, then work in their assigned office for 30 days before returning for two more weeks of training.

Training will emphasize interviewing skills, engaging and building rapport with parents, and building relationships with clients. Other topics will include: more information on safety decision making; case planning; Family to Family; and information from speakers who are foster parents and members of Facing Foster Care in Alaska.

The training modules for supervisors are brand-new for OCS and include such topics as: how to transition from a peer to a supervisor; varying learning styles; stages of worker development; differing cultural values; and how to give constructive feedback.

All front-line supervisors will be required to attend the new training by the end of 2009. It will be held in two three-day sessions, with some individual work required out of the sessions.

Both the enhanced SKILS and the new supervisory curriculum are designed to provide staff with the essential skills and competencies to be effective in their respective positions. This will not only improve outcomes for the families OCS serves but also hopefully have a positive impact on worker retention.

Preventive dental care for Alaska adults on Medicaid good until end of fiscal year

Since Medicaid began paying in April 2007 for eligible Alaskans' preventive and routine restorative dental care, more than 2,000 adults have received full or partial dentures. "Dentures to replace missing teeth can affect healthier food choices," state dentist Dr. Brad Whistler said. "Dentures can also have a positive effect on employment opportunities and self-esteem."

The annual limit of \$1,150 for preventive and restorative care ranges from exams and cleanings to root canals and dentures.

Spending down

Expenditures for these kinds of services in fiscal year 2008 were \$4.6 million, which is about 45 percent of the level anticipated in the fiscal note for that year, Whistler said. The funding was 23 percent from the state's general fund; 21 percent from Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority; and 56 percent from federal dollars.

"The lower level of expenditures is largely the result of lower than anticipated tribal dental participation in the program," Whistler explained. "The dental capacity of the tribal system, including dental work force vacancies, results in prioritizing dental services for children."

Additionally, some areas of the state have limited

participation of private dental offices in the program. Private dental participation in Medicaid has been the focus of national attention for the past 10 years, not only due to the lower Medicaid reimbursement rates but also missed appointments and short-notice cancellations by Medicaid recipients.

Dental preventive, routine restorative and denture services good until June 30

The annual limit for the period July 1, 2008–June 30, 2009 has remained at \$1,150 per adult Medicaid recipient. While the program is due to sunset June 30, 2009, legislation has been introduced to extend the services. Governor Palin supports an extension of these services, and funding for the services has been included in the Governor's budget pending legislative reauthorization.

Although Health and Social Services is actively working on securing the extension, as of this printing the department cannot assure coverage for services like dentures, root canals or routine restorative services past June 30, 2009. Medicaid dental care providers should discuss treatment alternatives and priorities with their patients in relation to the possible sunset of these services, Whistler said.

Car seat safety tips

Newly certified Child Passenger Safety Technician Natalie Coston, in white T-shirt, shows Sharon Morningstar (left in photo)

the proper way to secure her granddaughter, Autumn, in her new car seat. The car seat safety check was held as part of the child passenger safety training held the last week of October in Anchorage.



The Public Health Section of Injury Prevention holds multiple trainings each year; certifying approximately 40 car seat technicians annually. Motor vehicle-related injuries remain the single leading cause of fatalities and the second leading cause of hospitalization for Alaska children age 1–14.

Child Passenger Safety Technician training will be held in Houston for the first time on March 4, 5 and 6 at the Houston Fire Department, followed by a car seat check-up event at Mat-Su Alaska Sales and Service on March 7. For more information on the Houston training or the event, contact Education Specialist Gordon Glaser with the state section of Injury Prevention and Emergency Medical Services at gordon.glaser@alaska.gov or 269-3433.

To find the right size car seat for a child, go to http://hss.state.ak.us/dph/ipems/injury_prevention/CPS/. For a listing of statewide car seat safety events, click on the calendar on that page.

State and federal heating assistance keeps more Alaskans warm this winter

More Alaskans are receiving heating assistance this winter, thanks to a new program approved by the Legislature in 2008. Heating Assistance Program staff are reporting positive feedback from recipients who truly appreciate the extra help this winter.

In addition to the federally funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) for residents with incomes up to 150 percent of poverty income guidelines, the Division of Public Assistance is now also administering a state-funded Alaska Heating Assistance Program (AKHAP) for residents with income from 151 percent to 225 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.

For LIHEAP, the U.S. Congress approved spending up to \$5.1 billion nationwide, an increase from the \$2.6 billion approved in federal fiscal year 2008. Alaska is now receiving \$23,568,461 in LIHEAP block grants (\$16,332,944 for the state administered heating assistance program and \$7,235,517 for the tribal organizations) and \$7,359,326 in contingency funds (\$5,100,014 for the state program and \$2,259,312 for tribal organizations).

"Our workers have received hugs, cheers and tears

from residents who are thrilled and relieved to see the increased benefits this year," Heating Assistance Program Coordinator Susan Marshall said.

Stepped up outreach efforts including radio and newspaper ads, interior bus signs, public service announcements, and mailings to all residents who received benefits from any Public Assistance program have generated an average of 150 inquiries a day from potential recipients.

From the beginning of this year's heating season through Dec. 30, 2008, the division received 8,824 applications, which represents a 34-percent increase over the same period in 2007. Division staff processed and approved 3,499 LIHEAP grants totaling \$6,790,229 and 516 AKHAP totaling \$200,940.

Eight tribal organizations currently administering LIHEAP programs have requested AKHAP grants. These organizations have completed a Non-Competitive RFP and the division's Grants Administrator is in the process of reviewing these RFPs and making a recommendation to the Commissioner to approve the grants. For more information on AKHAP and LIHEAP, go to <http://hss.state.ak.us/dpa/programs/hap/>.

Family Size	Gross Monthly Income
1	\$2,438
2	\$3,281
3	\$4,125
4	\$4,969
5	\$5,813
6	\$6,656
7	\$7,500
8	\$8,344

For each additional household member add \$843.
If a family's income is less than the amount in this table, it may qualify. Payments from Senior Benefits Program and the PFD do not count as income.

Federal Food Stamp program makes changes

The federal Farm Bill 2008 contained several changes that affect Alaska food stamp recipients. Now named the 'Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program' — SNAP on a federal level, the program in Alaska will remain the 'Food Stamp Program' until changes are made to the Alaska Statutes and Alaska Administrative Code. Some other changes, effective Oct. 1, 2008, included:

- Alaska's new standard deduction is \$246 for all households.
- The \$175/\$200 cap on deduction of dependent care expenses is removed.
- Education and retirement accounts are now excluded.
- Alaska's minimum benefit (previously at \$10) for eligible one and two-person households is \$17 for those living in 'urban' communities; \$21 for 'rural I' communities, and \$26 for 'rural II' communities.

For more information on Alaska's Food Stamp Program, see <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/programs/fstamps/>.

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Top stories:

- State 'brings — and keeps — kids home'
- Contractor assumes Medicaid provider services
- Leadership changes announced

Veterans and Pioneers Home in Palmer named 'Best of Valley'

The Matanuska Valley's Frontiersman newspaper readers named the Alaska Veterans and Pioneers Home "Best of Valley" in 2008, which didn't surprise the home's administrator Lynda Garcia.

"The recognition is a testament to the staff's commitment to serve the organization's five core values of trust, excellence, positive attitude, accountability and love," Garcia said.

The Palmer facility differs from the other five pioneer homes in the state because of its certification by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as a home for Alaska



From left, Alaska Veterans and Pioneers Home residents Jessie DeVries, Thurston Dobson and Assisted Living Aide Melody Johnson enjoy a hearty laugh at the Beach Lake picnic on July 24, 2008.

veterans. The federal requirement for quality assurance has helped the staff measure all aspects of their services. Their care of residents has not changed, Garcia said, "but we now have a formal process for identifying potential problems and use a team approach to find solutions. The result is documented evidence of quality care."

The 'Best in Valley' accolade reflects the community's ties to the home. "The home's residents feel like they are part of the

community and the community feels like it's a part of the home," Garcia said. Recently, home residents stuffed envelopes for the community's recycling effort. During the holiday season, the Chamber of Commerce chose the home as one of its sites for the Colony Christmas gingerbread contest, where home residents and members of the public could vote on the best entry.

"This is another example of how we partner with the community to ensure the residents remain connected to it," Garcia explained. "For those who cannot go out into the community, it is important to bring the community in."

'Floating Health Fair' brings health information to rural residents of the Aleutians



Judith Bendersky was part of a team of 12 health educators and nurses on the first annual 2008 "Floating Health Fair," bringing health education activities to rural residents of the eastern Aleutian Islands in June. Bendersky is the program manager for the Senior Information Office, Alaska's resource for all things Medicare, housed in the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. The innovative voyage was organized by nurse Anna Buterbaugh and funded by the Eastern Aleutian Tribes. The health team boarded the ferry M/V Tustumena in Homer and made stops along the Aleutian chain to Dutch Harbor. The group disembarked, assembled all their materials and held a community health fair in King Cove, Cold Bay, Akutan and other communities. Interactive exhibits included a focus on heart health, tobacco control, oral health care, injury and drowning prevention, and honoring elders.