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Alaska Department of Health & Social Services
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JOINT NEWS RELEASE

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State, partners work to boost awareness, prevention of brain injury

Major cause of disability among all age groups; almost entirely preventable

(Anchorage) – From soldiers to snowmachiners, skateboarders to seniors, Alaskans of all ages are at risk of brain injury – and all have the power to protect themselves against brain damage.

Each year, 150 Alaskans die from brain injuries. Right now, 10,000 Alaskans are living with a disability due to a brain injury.

To share that brain injuries are preventable, and to support people who face new life challenges as a result of a brain injury, the Alaska Brain Injury Network and partners are taking several steps:

- **A Yup'ik language poster** is being released in the Bethel area – site of the highest brain injury rate in the state. The need for more awareness became clear when translator Irma Goodwine noted there was no Yup'ik expression for head injury. She consulted with elders to come up with “qamiqvukun akngirtelleq,” or “when you hurt your head.”
- The state has its **first case manager to support people with brain injuries**, age 18 and older in Southcentral. Kimberly Krick, RN most recently worked at Elmendorf Air Force Base Traumatic Brain Injury Clinic, where she assessed troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The position is housed in the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Senior and Disabilities Services and is funded by The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority.

- **Olympic snowboarder Callan Chythlook-Sifsof will spread the prevention message** at the Alaska Brain Injury Network booth at the Native Youth Olympics on Saturday, April 24 in Anchorage, and speak to students in Dillingham later this spring.

“Wear a helmet!” said Olympian Chythlook-Sifsof. “People think I take a lot of risks for my sport, but with training and a helmet, those risks are really reduced.”

Top causes of brain injury are falls, motor vehicle crashes and assault. Simple steps like wearing a helmet and checking elders’ homes for tripping hazards are powerful preventions.

“Almost every cause of brain injury is preventable,” said Jill Hodges, executive director of the Brain Injury Network.

“Treatment is crucial for successful recovery from brain injuries,” Hodges added. “Always get medical attention – even seemingly mild injuries like a concussion can be harmful or fatal.”

Unidentified or untreated brain injury is a risk factor for homelessness, suicide, and ending up in jail.

After a series of accidents, one Alaskan, featured in the Yup'ik poster, lived what he calls ‘a troubled life.’ When his injury was diagnosed, a “huge burden had been lifted.” He knew what was wrong and that he could take steps to deal with it.

Family members may notice changes like fatigue, irritability and mood changes, and take that as a sign to get checked out. For more severe injuries, a combination of services, from physical therapy to counseling to job training, can help people find ways to do what’s important to them – work, participate in subsistence, and play with friends and family.

For more information, visit the Alaska Brain Injury Network Web site: www.alaskabraininjury.net.