



Alaska Commission on Aging SFY2019 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

Provide appropriate supports for family and other caregivers caring for older Alaskans

Family caregiving is the foundation of long-term care in Alaska. Approximately 84,900 Alaskans (or 12% of the state's total population) care for vulnerable Alaskans because of a physical, mental, and/or cognitive impairment. This care is valued at more than \$1 billion annually (AARP 2015). An estimated 33,000 Alaskans care for an elderly loved one with dementia, or five caregivers to one senior with Alzheimer's disease. The value of that care is \$480 million annually (Alzheimer's Facts and Figures 2016).

As Alaska's population ages, family caregiving and natural supports are becoming increasingly important in the care of loved ones at home having chronic health conditions, physical disabilities, and cognitive impairments. While many families provide compassionate care for their elderly loved ones at home, caregiving can take a significant toll. Research indicates that family caregivers of older adults – particularly those who care for loved ones with dementia – are more likely to report poor health, higher rates of chronic disease, as well as emotional depression and anxiety than non-caregivers. Family caregivers of significantly impaired older adults are also vulnerable to financial burden due to lost wages and benefits when they cut back on work hours or leave the workplace due to caregiving demands. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey Caregiver Module being conducted this year by the Division of Public Health will increase understanding of the impact of caregiving, provide insights into unmet needs related to caregiving, and support analyses regarding associations of caregiving with health factors. This information will assist various partners to educate stakeholders, inform public health policy, and develop programs to serve caregivers of a variety of conditions.

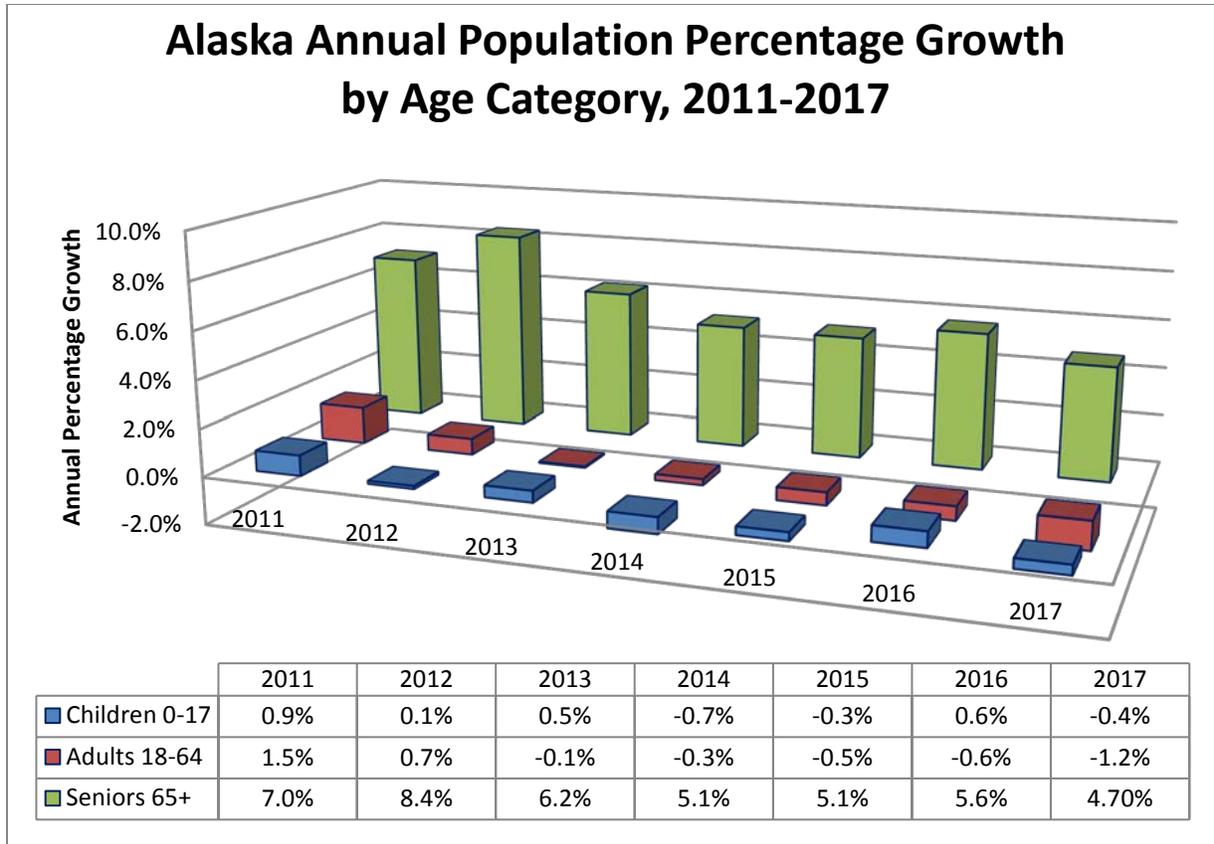
Research shows that investment in caregiver supports produces a positive return. Family and other natural caregivers who receive training and supportive services are better able to provide care at home improving the quality of life and safety for both the caregiver and the person under their care, providing a huge cost savings by preventing the need for premature institutional care. If the needs of caregivers are not addressed, we risk compromising the safety and well-being of seniors and their families.

Recommendations: The Alaska Commission on Aging supports efforts to

- (1) Preserve funding for the National Family Caregiver Support Grant Program, Adult Day, Senior In-Home Services, and Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Education and Supports program, administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services Community Grants Program, that provide caregiver training, respite, case management, counseling, peer supports, and adult day. These services support unpaid caregivers caring for their elderly loved ones at home, allowing them to provide safe and quality care at home.
- (2) Adopt a uniform family caregiver assessment tool to identify specific caregiver needs and provide person- and family-centered caregiver support and training. These services equip families and other natural caregivers with the resources they need to prevent the need for early out-of-home placement. (The average annual cost for skilled nursing home care in Alaska is \$164,234 per individual, according to Senior and Disabilities Services, or as high as \$292,000 per individual, according to Genworth Long-Term Care Cost Survey, 2017.)

- (3) Incorporate *enabling technologies* as services provided by the Alaskans Living Independently waiver. Enabling technologies encompass assistive technology, home telehealth monitoring, and medication management that assist seniors and other vulnerable Alaskans to live safely and comfortably at home.
- (4) Create a State Family Caregiver Strategy to recognize and support family caregivers by designing recommendations to support working caregivers, provide specialized training for caregivers who care for loved ones with memory loss and challenging behaviors, and increase caregiver respite.

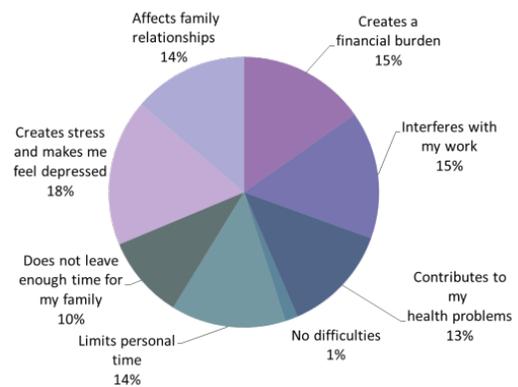
While the numbers of Alaskan seniors are on the rise, the numbers of potential caregivers are declining as the senior population is growing much faster than all other age categories.



Families taking caring of their own



What is the most difficult challenge you face as a caregiver?



Source: Alaska’s Roadmap to Address Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias, 2014