



Alaska Commission on Aging FY2019 Advocacy Priorities

1. Reauthorize the *Alaska Senior Benefits Program*, HB 236 and SB 170

Since 2007, Senior Benefits has provided critical financial assistance for more than 11,400 low-income Alaska seniors, according to the Division of Public Assistance (August 2017 Senior Benefits Fact Sheet). The program currently provides benefits ranging from \$76 to \$250 monthly to Alaska seniors, age 65+, with household incomes from 75 to 175 percent of federal poverty level. In September 2017, the House Health and Social Services Committee sponsored a listening session for public members to express their views about how Senior Benefits assists low-income seniors. More than 50 public members provided passionate testimony in support of continuing the program as it helps cover basic expenses for food, heating, medication, housing, and transportation for low-income seniors. Financial security is a serious worry for many older people living on a fixed income. ACoA strongly supports passage of HB 236 to continue Senior Benefits providing assistance to low-income seniors that allows them to afford basic necessities and to live with dignity. *Without legislative action this session, Senior Benefits will end on June 30, 2018!*

2. Protect the Senior Safety Net, to the greatest extent possible. This "Net" provides critical financial assistance and home- and community-based long-term support services to vulnerable older Alaskans, age 60+.

These core services help seniors maintain their health and independence. When these services are reduced or eliminated, older people become more at risk for declining health and impairment, which, in turn, increases the burden of care on family and other natural caregivers, and raises the possibility for expensive out-of-home placement. In 1993, the 1915(c) waiver was approved in Alaska. *This year commemorates 25 years of home and community based waiver services in Alaska!*

3. Provide appropriate supports for family and other natural caregivers for older Alaskans

because family caregiving is the foundation of long-term care in Alaska. As Alaska's population ages, family caregiving and natural supports are becoming increasingly important for the care of Alaskans with chronic health conditions, physical disabilities, and cognitive impairments. Research indicates that family caregivers of older adults with dementia are more likely to report poor health and higher rates of chronic disease, as well as depression and anxiety, than non-caregivers. Those who receive training and supports are better equipped to provide safe, quality care longer at home. The Alaska Commission on Aging recommends: (1) sustained funding for the *National Family Caregiver Support Program* (providing respite, training, counseling, and other supports); (2) adoption of a uniform family caregiver assessment tool to identify specific caregiver needs and offer person-centered caregiver support; and the (3) inclusion of *enabling technology* (such as assistive technology, home telehealth monitoring, and medication management) as optional services through the Adults Living Independently Waiver to provide caregiver support.

4. Improve capacity to serve Alaskans with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

To the greatest extent possible, the ACoA supports maintaining at least base grant funding for *Adult Day, Senior In-Home, and Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Education and Supports* program to serve those who require care and live in the community but do not meet Medicaid eligibility. The Commission also supports continued funding for Personal Care Services, Alaskans Living Independently waiver, and the

Pioneer Homes that specialize in dementia care. ACoA recommends including enabling technology as a service option in the Alaskans Living Independently waiver, in addition to cueing and supervision in the Community First Choice option, as well as exploration of an 1115 demonstration waiver to enhance care for Alaskans living with dementia in the community.

ACoA supports development of a long-range fiscal plan that includes a diverse array of revenue sources to pay for these services. Seniors contribute more than \$3 billion to the State’s economy. Alaska’s senior services help older Alaskans to remain in-state, contributing to the well-being of their families and communities.

For further information, please contact Denise Daniello, ACoA’s Executive Director, at 465-4879 or denise.daniello@alaska.gov.

