

Alaska Commission on Aging

FY 2014 Policy Recommendations

Support development of an Alaska State Plan for Persons with Alzheimer's Disease & Related Dementia (ADRD).

Alzheimer's disease is an emerging public health issue. The prevalence of Alzheimer's disease is increasing both nationally and in Alaska due to the growing older adult population, the numbers of people living to an advanced age, and improved early detection. Because the incidence of Alzheimer's disease is highly correlated with advanced age, the aging of Alaska's population has significant implications for the resources needed to care for individuals with ADRD. The rate of increase of Alzheimer's disease in Alaska is expected to be one of the highest in the nation, as Alaska is the state with the fastest growing senior population. Based on 2010 census data and age prevalence estimates, there are approximately 6,141 Alaskans age 65 and older who are at risk for ADRD (ACoA's FY2013 estimates based on national age prevalence estimates). This number is projected to almost triple over the next twenty years when the number of Alaskans with ADRD may exceed 17,000 individuals based on current trends.

Alaska requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach to address the multiple and complex challenges that Alzheimer's disease poses to individuals, families, caregivers and our State's budget. An ADRD State Plan is needed to assess the current and future impact of Alzheimer's disease in Alaska by gathering input from individuals and families impacted by ADRD as well as the general public; identifying services and support gaps that exist for persons with ADRD and their unpaid family caregivers; and proposing short-term and long-term strategies for confronting the challenges presented by Alaska's growing ADRD population.

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is in the process of conducting a needs assessment of the issues surrounding the ADRD population through community forums and surveys. In FY2014, the ACoA will offer leadership to a steering committee comprised of state agencies and stakeholders to develop an Alaska ADRD State Plan to provide a roadmap that will promote greater public awareness and help to strengthen services for individuals and families impacted by ADRD.

Implement Strategies to Protect Persons with ADRD Who Wander (HB 59/SB36).

Wandering is one of the most significant personal safety risks faced by individuals with Alzheimer's disease. Nearly 60% of people with Alzheimer's disease wander at some point during the course of their disease. Approximately half of all wanderings result in personal injury if the person is not found within 24 hours (Alzheimer's Association 2011). For an older person being outside unprotected during the wintertime even for a short time, wandering can have life and death consequences.

ACoA recommends implementation of a coordinated response system, similar to the Amber Alert for missing children, to report missing older adults. A *Silver Alert* system would require a coordinated response system involving Public Safety and the Department of Military Affairs to send out an immediate notification when a vulnerable older person is missing. The majority of states have established Silver Alert systems. In order to avoid a false alert and to protect the privacy, dignity and independence of the older person who is the subject of the alert, it would require that the person who initiates the alert be the legal guardian or close family member, reside in the same household, or be a caregiver who has had recent contact with the subject.

Alaska Commission on Aging

P.O. Box 110693 Juneau, Alaska 99811-0693

Phone: 907-465-3250 / Fax: 907-465-1398

www.alaskaaging.org

Ensuring the dignity and independence of all older Alaskans and assisting them through planning, advocacy, education and interagency cooperation to lead useful and meaningful lives.

Promote Elder Protection through support of the Governor’s budget increment for the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (Department of Revenue, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority).

The Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OLTCO) investigates all reports of harm/complaints relating to seniors in assisted living and nursing homes. The OLTCO is responding to increasing numbers of complaints from vulnerable seniors residing in long-term care settings and from Adult Protective Service referrals. The average number of new OLTCO monthly cases opened increased from 14 in FY2009 to 58 in FY2013. Many of these cases are complex and require time to investigate. Annual caseloads have increased from 170 (FY09) to 535 (FY12). As a result of the increased pressure to investigate cases, the OLTCO is less able to provide other Ombudsman services necessary to protect vulnerable seniors. The number of unannounced facility visits, for example, (not involving an investigation) dropped by 50% in FY2013. These visits are important to identify and resolve problems in the homes before seniors are hurt. There are over 600 homes statewide. Many homes outside of Anchorage, Fairbanks, and the Mat-Su Borough have not received unannounced visits.

The ACoA supports the OLTCO’s request for a 1.0 fulltime Assistance Long-Term Care Ombudsman position in the amount of \$107,400 (\$94,000 for the position and \$13,400 for supporting costs) to increase their capacity to respond to an increasing number of reports of harm/complaints involving seniors. This position will be responsible for complaint investigations, problem resolutions, consultation, and unannounced monitoring visits statewide.

Implement Policies and Funding to Stimulate the Development of Senior Housing

Across the Continuum of Care. The demand for quality, accessible and affordable senior housing that addresses the continuum of care is increasing as the older adult population grows in Alaska. Access to appropriate housing for seniors with physical, behavioral health, and cognitive disabilities such as Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias is required to allow older Alaskans the ability to age in place with dignity as close to their home community as possible. The Alaska Commission on Aging supports policies and adequate amounts of funding to provide safe and appropriate housing for older Alaskans from independent senior housing to housing with supportive services and assisted living and nursing home care. The ACoA supports AHFC’s capital budget request for the Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund to provide gap financing to construct and renovate senior housing statewide.

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