

State of Alaska
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Sarah Palin, Governor

Karleen Jackson
Commissioner
P.O. Box 110601
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0601
NEWS RELEASE



Sherry Hill
Public Affairs Director

907-465-1618
FAX: 907-465-3068
www.hss.state.ak.us

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Contact: Sherry Hill, (907) 465-1618, Cell (907) 321-2838
Ross Soboleff (907) 465-1611, Cell (907) 321-3838

Alaska Health Care Strategies Planning Council tackles broad issues related to Alaskans' health care

Council seeks public comment on Web-based forum

(Anchorage, Alaska) — The Alaska Health Care Strategies Planning Council, a short-term Governor's Advisory Council, held its first comprehensive meeting July 30, 2007, to begin identifying data regarding health care in the state.

More than 20 members of the public attended, including representatives from the media, The Salvation Army, Alaska Health Roundtable, Alaska Primary Care Association, members of the Legislature, Hospice of Anchorage, AARP, and others.

During the meeting, held at the BP Energy Center in Anchorage, the council heard presentations on data about Alaskans without health insurance and the behavioral and physical health of state residents.

“The council’s task is to recommend short- and long-term strategies to address balancing the cost of, access to, and quality of health care for Alaska citizens,” said council chair Health and Social Services Commissioner Karleen Jackson. The 14-member council’s recommendations and action plan will be presented to the governor and the Legislature by January 2008.

This summer and fall the House and Senate Health, Education and Social Services (HES) committees are holding hearings to evaluate issues relative to health care. Council members are encouraged to attend those hearings because many of the issues addressed in current legislation under consideration, such as Certificate of Need and Denali KidCare, are relevant to their work.

In addition, the council may identify strategies to be included in its final report, which could result in legislation to be proposed by either HES committees or Gov. Sarah Palin. Rep. Peggy Wilson and Sen. Bettye Davis, chairs of the respective Health, Education and Social Services committees in the Alaska Legislature, serve as ex-officio, non-voting members on the council.

“Since the council is not a legislative committee, but rather a time-limited Governor’s Advisory Council, the HES committee chairs will work with bill sponsors of currently proposed legislation to coordinate information made available to the council members,” Jackson added.

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The council is in the early stages of evaluating the extent and depth of quandaries facing Alaskans in accessing and affording quality health care. Two more meetings are scheduled for August and September to address data regarding funding, infrastructure, workforce development and reform strategies.

“In October and November the council will identify potential strategies to address the problems identified by the data reviewed,” Jackson explained, “followed by a December meeting to finalize a draft report and to consider public input on that draft.”

For more information about the Alaska Health Care Strategies Planning Council, including meeting schedules, meeting minutes, activities and resources, see <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/hspc/>. A live webcast link is posted for meetings, and tapes will be available in the future. An online forum for public input will be available on the Web site before the next council meeting. For further information on the council and its activities, e-mail hss.healthstrategies@alaska.gov.

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