Alaska Department of Health and Social Services

2009 PRIORITIES

The overriding theme for future direction for the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services is ***helping individuals and families create safe and healthy communities.***

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse affects every family and community in Alaska. It is a contributing factor in suicides, crime, unemployment, domestic violence, child abuse, school dropouts, juvenile delinquency, etc. We need to prevent, intervene early, treat and help people recover from substance abuse through public/private partnerships and long-term strategies.

Major strategies include:

- **Prevention:** Implement Prevention of Underage Drinking Initiative; target substance abuse and suicide prevention programs to those communities most in need.
- **Early Intervention:** Integrate primary care with behavioral health (mental health and substance abuse); screen all youth in the juvenile justice system for substance abuse.
- **Treatment:** Develop and implement family-based treatment services (based on the California SHIELDS for FAMILIES project); submit substance abuse Medicaid Waiver targeting adults; implement involuntary treatment and secure detoxification services.
- **Recovery:** Support array of recovery services using performance-based standards and funding. Continue to integrate mental health and substance abuse services into a behavioral health system.

Health and Wellness

Many Alaskans lead less happy and less productive lives, and many die prematurely each year, because of disability and death caused by tobacco, alcohol abuse, injuries, obesity, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and sexually transmitted diseases. The economic impact of chronic disease alone in Alaska is staggering: an estimated $600 million is spent annually on direct medical services and $1.9 billion in lost productivity. Most of this is attributable to personal choice involving diet, physical activity and tobacco use — and is preventable. We can do a better job of screening, diagnosing and treating these conditions.

Major strategies include:

- **Prevention:** Implement evidence-based, population-based health promotion efforts. Increase primary prevention approaches, including those targeting increased self responsibility, improved policies and environmental supports that encourages healthy choices. Educate about and improve methods for screening, diagnosis, and early treatment of conditions and behaviors most detrimental to the physical and mental health of Alaskans. Implement Early Childhood Comprehensive System recommendations (including a focus on early childhood mental health).
- **Access:** Grow the health care workforce and expand the number of Alaskans with health insurance.
- **Trauma system:** Develop a statewide trauma system.
- **Emergency Response Planning and Preparedness:** Work with communities to prevent health emergencies and prepare for pandemics and natural disasters.
- **Environmental Health Impacts:** Assess, guide and mitigate environmental impacts on health in Alaska. Develop expertise in performing health impact assessments.

Health Care Reform

Alaska's health care system continues to be fragmented and uncoordinated and doesn't produce the kinds of outcomes we expect. By strategically focusing on care management, reforming Medicaid, creating a Health Care Commission and growing our health care workforce, we can transform our health care system.

Major strategies include:

- **Care Management**: Improve care coordination; implement disease management program for chronic diseases and explore use of primary care case management strategy for most disabled populations; complete planning for the Bring the Kids Home Initiative.
- **Medicaid Reform:** Develop legislative and systemic recommendations for reforming Medicaid aimed at improving Medicaid sustainability.
- **Health Care Commission:** Establish a commission in order to build public awareness and define the future roles of the state, business, providers and individuals regarding health care funding and delivery.
- **Health Care Workforce:** Partner with the federal government and other states to increase training capacity and expand training programs for health care professions.

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Long-Term Care

Seniors represent the fastest growing population in Alaska and it is our responsibility to determine what kinds of services we want for our aging parents (and grandparents) in order to keep them at home in their own communities. We need to develop a long-term care plan, improve services to those with Alzheimer's Disease and related disorders, and promote the expansion of aging and disability resource centers.

Major strategies include:

- **Long-Term Care Plan:** Develop an immediate and sustainable long-term care plan. DHSS has contracted with HCBS Strategies to develop this plan, which includes:
  - support for family caregivers;
  - improved service arrays and definitions of future roles of residential settings, e.g., the Pioneer Homes and nursing homes;
  - development of the workforce to meet long-term care needs; and
  - interdisciplinary departmental planning to provide quality assurance, provider training, audit and compliance coordination.
- **Long-Term Care and Services for Alaska Natives:** Work with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to identify and implement long-term care services.
- **Alzheimer Disease and Related Disorders Waiver:** Submit Waiver.
- **Aging and Disability Resource Centers:** Promote expansion of these centers.

Vulnerable Alaskans

We need to ensure that both kids and communities are safe, that developmentally disabled kids and adults have access to quality services and supports, and that individuals and families get the kind of financial and vocational supports they need to be contributing members of society. By focusing on family-centered services and through the use of performance-based standards and funding, we can better meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens and their families.

Major strategies include:

- **Family-Centered Services Project:** Expand this project, which is designed to help families leave the public assistance rolls and find employment.
- **Performance-Based Standards:** Implement use of performance-based standards and funding for grantees.
- **Licensing, Certification and Training Standards:** Ensure providers comply with these standards.
- **Social Service Workforce:** Recruit and retain a qualified social services workforce using evidence-based practices to design and implement a department-wide approach.