

# FACT SHEET

## CAREGIVERS, SUPPORT STAFF AND ALASKANS WITH DISABILITIES

### DISABILITY FACTS

#### ALASKANS WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE HEALTH DISPARITIES

- Higher body mass index
- Increased cigarette use
- Less physical activity
- Fewer preventive screenings
- Poorer mental health
- Higher rates of diabetes
- Lower rates of health care utilization

*23.8% OF ALASKA'S  
POPULATION OVER THE  
AGE OF 18 EXPERIENCE  
A DISABILITY (BRFSS, 2012)*

#### CONTRIBUTORS TO HEALTH DISPARITIES

- Structural barriers to care
- Communication differences or insensitivity
- Comfort level of health care providers
- Availability of providers
- Focus on disability rather than whole person
- Financial barriers to care
- Need for assistance accessing person-centered and coordinated services

### ALASKA'S CAREGIVER ROLES IN HEALTHCARE

- Successful visits require 40.0% more time for patients with disabilities
- Direct care staff arrange transportation to 50.5% of healthcare visits
- 41.4% of direct care staff request accommodations for healthcare visits on behalf of a person with a disability
- 57.0% of agency and support staff attend health appointments with those they support
- Support staff reported healthcare provider comfort level with people with disabilities as 3.3 on a 5 point scale (0=very uncomfortable to 5=very comfortable)
- Support staff who always attend healthcare visits report longer appointment times and increased provider comfort with people with disabilities

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## ALASKA'S CAREGIVER ROLES IN HEALTHCARE (CONTINUED)

- Higher support staff caseloads means lower likelihood they attend healthcare appointments
- Family/guardian caregivers are more likely to always attend healthcare appointments than direct service workers, clinicians or case managers
- A person with a disability is more likely to access preventative health services if their support staff always attend healthcare appointments
- People with disabilities whose support staff never attend their healthcare appointments experience more difficulty accessing transportation and navigating the healthcare system

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

### INCREASE ACCESS TO SERVICES

- Increase availability of peer support services
- Advocate for improved transportation access
- Increase use of preventative care, screening and diagnostic services, and therapeutic and specialist services

### IMPROVE COORDINATION OF CARE

- Include people with disabilities in decisions
- Solicit feedback from people with disabilities
- Encourage family participation
- Improve health literacy of providers
- Assist with navigating healthcare system

This fact sheet presents highlights from:

Atkinson, J., Smith, C., Tew, L., Heath, K., Reed, D., & Miller, J. (2014). *Promotion, Prevention, and Preparedness for Alaskans with Disabilities: Alaska's Disability & Health Program Needs Assessment Report*.

University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development, Anchorage, AK. Full report available at:

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/wcfh/Pages/disability>

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### NEEDED CAREGIVER TRAINING

- Home health and hospice care
- Mental health first aid
- Challenging behaviors
- Effective communication
- Co-occurring behavioral health/developmental disabilities concerns
- Basic sign language
- Importance of working teams
- Person-centered services
- Healthy living
- Prevention of abuse
- Advocacy
- Available resources/services