

# FACT SHEET

## HEALTHCARE FOR ALASKANS WITH DISABILITIES



### ALASKANS WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE HEALTH DISPARITIES

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

### SOME CAUSES OF HEALTH DISPARITIES

- Physical 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

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

### HEALTHCARE ACCORDING TO ALASKANS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

#### PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAVE LIMITED ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

- Limited number of providers within a community
- Limited number of providers who accept public insurance
- Waitlists
- Providers with limited knowledge to address a disability issue
- Staff and provider turnover
- Large caseloads
- Access to adult dental care is a particular problem

#### PUBLIC INSURANCE PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO GET HEALTHCARE SERVICES

- Provides access to health care services
- Helps lower the financial burden for people with complex medical needs

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## PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES EXPERIENCE DELAYS IN THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM, WHICH EFFECT CARE

- Difficulty navigating the system
- Information technology and communication problems
- Waitlists

## BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES ARE LIMITED FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN ALASKA

- Long waitlists
- Financial limitations
- Confusion about accessing services
- An unwelcome reliance on medications
- Providers lacking understanding of co-occurring behavioral health and disability needs

## INADEQUATE HEALTHCARE OPTIONS CAUSE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO SEEK SERVICES OUTSIDE THEIR COMMUNITY

- Increased financial and time burden
- Lengthy approval processes
- Displacement from home community

## PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND COMPLEX MEDICAL NEEDS BENEFIT FROM A COORDINATED, TEAM APPROACH IN HEALTHCARE SERVICES

- Particularly needed for medication management and specialty care
- Supports motivation
- Reduces stress on the individual and their family

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ALASKANS WITH DISABILITIES AND FAMILIES

- Training for healthcare providers
- Advocacy training for people with disabilities and families
- Simplify language and terms; make websites accessible and easier to navigate
- Provide a list of healthcare providers accepting public insurance
- Provide materials about navigating the healthcare system
- Increase the use of telehealth and travelling health services

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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