

GOAL 6

ALASKANS ARE FREE FROM
ABUSE, NEGLECT, SELF-NEGLECT,
AND EXPLOITATION.

- 6.1 Objective:** Prevent child maltreatment by ensuring resilient families.
- 6.2 Objective:** Promote early intervention in maltreatment and with families at risk for maltreatment.
- 6.3 Objective:** Ensure individuals who suspect potential abuse understand the role of protective agencies and how to report potential abuse and neglect.
- 6.4 Objective:** Increase timely access to protective services statewide.
- 6.5 Objective:** Ensure vulnerable Alaskans understand their rights and responsibilities.

GOAL 6: PROTECTING VULNERABLE ALASKANS

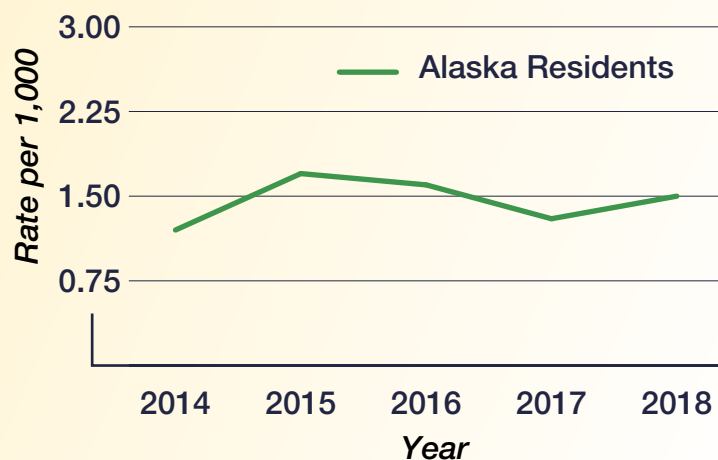
Vulnerable Alaskans, both children and adults, should be provided with supportive and protective services. State and local public awareness campaigns, training programs, and multi-disciplinary teams are essential when providing these supportive services. In addition to improving the systems for responding to children and adults experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect, it is vital that we focus on preventing them from ever entering the system by supporting healthy, resilient families and healing intergenerational trauma.

Concerns for the safety of Alaska’s children and vulnerable adults are reported by neighbors, teachers, nurses, treatment providers, and others to the Office of Children’s Services (OCS) and Adult Protective Services (APS). At OCS, over the past five years, these reports increased from 15,917 in fiscal year 2014 (FY14) to 22,253 in fiscal year 2018 (FY18). APS has seen an increase of reports of harm (particularly self-neglect and financial exploitation) to adults with mental illness, cognitive impairments, and chronic substance misuse.

VULNERABLE ALASKAN: a person who, because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to meet their own needs or to seek help without assistance AS 47.24.900 (21)

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA: a traumatic event that began years prior to the current generation and has impacted the ways in which individuals within a family understand, cope with, and heal from trauma¹

Figure 11: Founded Reports of Harm to Adults (rate per 1,000)



Source

Data from Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Adult Protective Services

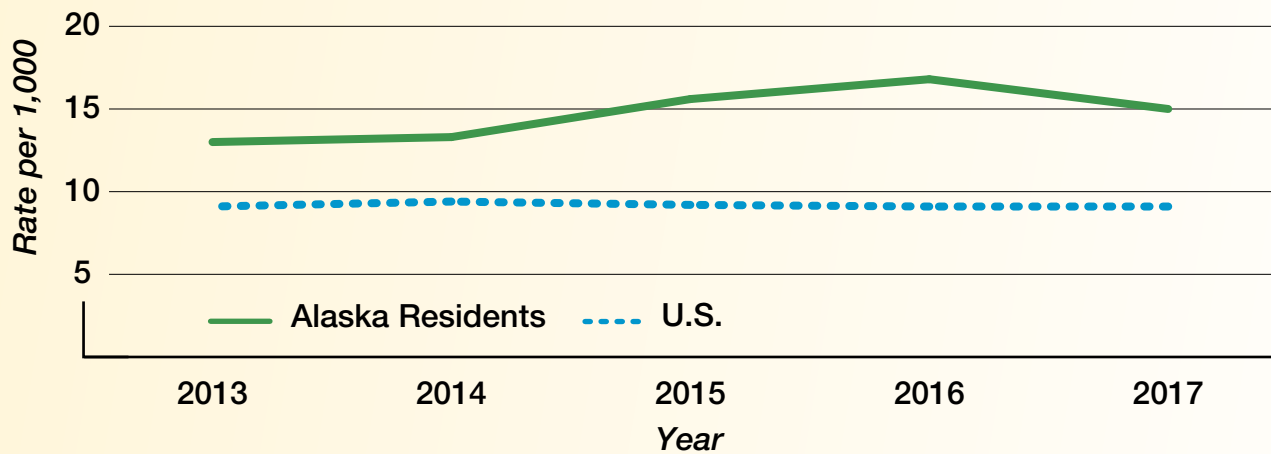
Since 2005, OCS has coordinated Alaska’s effort to use the Strengthening Families approach to engage families, programs, and communities in building five protective factors to prevent abuse. The five protective factors that are related to the prevention of child maltreatment for adults are: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and for children healthy social and emotional development. This framework is now embedded in professional development across multiple systems and communities. OCS continues to

CULTURAL COMPETENCE:
the ability of providers and organizations to effectively deliver healthcare services that meet the social, cultural, and linguistic needs of patients²

enhance these prevention efforts by asking agencies and communities to consider three main philosophies when designing and conducting their services for families. Services should be 1) individualized and strength-based, 2) culturally sensitive/competent, and 3) trauma-informed. A recent initiative titled Circles of Support aims to prevent children from being placed out of their homes and to strengthen families.

APS, a unit within the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS), through a four-pronged approach, works to achieve this goal by 1) developing and strengthening prevention and awareness efforts at the state and local levels; 2) conducting abuse, neglect, and exploitation investigations from reports of harm on vulnerable individuals; 3) providing protective services to prevent or stop harm from occurring; and 4) offering supportive services to ensure safety in community and home environments.

Figure 12: Child Maltreatment (rate per 1,000)



Source

Data from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children’s Bureau
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/research-data-technology/statistics-research/child-maltreatment>

Depending on the family circumstances, severity of safety concern, and family support systems, OCS is responsible for determining if a removal from the home is required to maintain child safety. In FY14 the number of children in out-of-home placement in Alaska was 3,024. That number was dramatically increased to 4,234 in FY18. This increase, as well as the struggles to gain permanency for children in care, has increased the caseloads of family services and generalist protective services staff to more than double the recommended average. Likewise, the increase in adult reports of harm has continued to push APS investigator caseloads past the national average.

6.1 Objective: Prevent child maltreatment by ensuring resilient families.

- a. Strategy:** Develop, in partnership with a collective network, a comprehensive statewide plan to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- b. Strategy:** Develop a statewide outreach campaign for perinatal care providers to make trauma-informed, culturally responsive approaches.
- c. Strategy:** Provide referrals for basic needs services as a standard for perinatal and pediatric care.
- d. Strategy:** Expand access to and availability of prenatal and early childhood home visitation services.
- e. Strategy:** Move toward the creation of paid family leave policies, family-friendly workplaces, and other employment policies that support caregiver attachment and bonding with children and leave time to care for children who are sick or out of school/care.
- f. Strategy:** Explore practice-informed strategies to support attachment and bonding for incarcerated caregivers.
- g. Strategy:** Support working families through increasing availability, affordability, and quality of early childhood education programs from infancy through pre-K.

6.2 Objective: Promote early intervention in maltreatment and with families at risk for maltreatment.

- a. Strategy:** Increase effective public awareness around the signs of potential abuse and how to respond.
- b. Strategy:** Leverage 1115 Medicaid behavioral health waiver services and develop Families First Prevention Services Act services to support children in their homes and prevent out-of-home placement whenever possible.
- c. Strategy:** Explore and consider expanding the Palmer Families with Infants and Toddlers (FIT) Courts statewide.
- d. Strategy:** Negotiate with tribes and Alaska Native tribal organizations to implement prevention services under the Alaska Tribal Child Welfare Compact.

6.3 Objective: Ensure individuals who suspect potential abuse understand the role of protective agencies and how to report potential abuse and neglect.

- a. Strategy:** Increase awareness of OCS, child abuse reporting procedures, and mandatory reporter obligations.
- b. Strategy:** Increase awareness of services and supports available through the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).
- c. Strategy:** Increase awareness of APS, abuse reporting procedures, and mandatory reporter obligations.
- d. Strategy:** Improve access to training for mandatory reporters.
- e. Strategy:** Ensure online reporting is available 24/7.
- f. Strategy:** Establish interagency data-sharing agreements to ensure reports of harm are transmitted timely and accurately.
- g. Strategy:** Encourage communities to implement a coordinated community response system.

6.4 Objective: Increase timely access to protective services statewide.

- a. Strategy:** Support communities building sustainable, systemic approaches to protection services.
- b. Strategy:** Apply a person-centered model to the delivery of protective services.
- c. Strategy:** Continue funding for emergency and transitional housing options.
- d. Strategy:** Prioritize and enhance existing strategies to increase recruitment and retention efforts for protective services workers.
- e. Strategy:** Recruit and retain certified long-term care ombudsman volunteers.
- f. Strategy:** Promote timely reunification with families for children and youth in state custody.

PROTECTIVE SERVICES:
are intended to prevent or alleviate harm resulting from undue influence, abandonment, exploitation, abuse, neglect, or self-neglect and are provided to a vulnerable adult or child who needs protection

6.5 Objective: Ensure vulnerable Alaskans understand their rights and responsibilities.

a. Strategy: Develop an awareness campaign to educate people about the array of legal services or options offered in Alaska.

b. Strategy: Improve access to advocacy supports, and quality civil and criminal legal assistance for all beneficiaries.

c. Strategy: Support the court system in creating a statewide probate process that is consistent across judicial districts.

d. Strategy: Establish pathways for vulnerable adults who are in institutional levels of care, such as the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API), Department of Corrections (DOC), Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), residential psychiatric treatment centers (RPTC), or nursing homes to access protective services.

ENDNOTES

Online Resource for the Children of Alaska (ORCA) database query emailed by the Department of Health and Social Services Program Administrator on 12/14/2018.

¹ <https://www.acamh.org/blog/intergenerational-trauma/>

² Betancourt, J. R., Green, A. R., & Carrillo, J. E. *Cultural Competence in Health Care: Emerging Frameworks and Practical Approaches*, New York: The Commonwealth Fund. 2002.