

Alaska Commission on Aging

National Family Caregiver Support Program

DHSS Division of Senior & Disabilities Services, Senior Community-Based Grants Component

Recommended FY2016 Budget Increase: \$325,000

FY2015 Base Funding: \$1,026,575 (\$762,530 Federal/\$261,045 GF)



RECOMMENDATION: Caregiving is a pressing issue that will virtually affect all of us as the need for long-term services and supports increases due to the growing population of frail older Alaskans. Families and informal caregivers are the backbone of Alaska's long-term support system. They provide 80% of the in-home care for seniors and comprise a rapidly growing component of our health care system. While family caregiving is rewarding, it is also very challenging and places caregivers at risk for poor health and financial hardship. The Family Caregiver Support Program provides training, respite, care coordination, and other supports to assist families in the care of their elderly loved ones at home and grandparents raising at-risk grandchildren. These services help to keep caregivers strong and delay the need for costly institutional care. Senior and Disabilities Services reports 21 caregivers on a statewide waitlist for services based on provider feedback (December 2014). Additional base funding is recommended to address the waitlist for services, build program capacity to serve more family caregivers of seniors with dementia, and provide specialized training for families who are being called upon to provide nursing tasks at home.

WHY DO WE NEED FAMILY CAREGIVER SUPPORT SERVICES? Family caregivers are the heart and soul of Alaska's long-term support services for older Alaskans living at home needing assistance due to Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, physical disabilities, and chronic health conditions. They are critical to keeping loved ones living safely at home. When family caregivers receive appropriate supports and training, research shows they are able to provide care at home one year or longer, thus postponing the need for higher cost institutional care. Family caregiver support services provide preventative care to maintain the health and well-being of caregivers. Many caregivers seek assistance when they are in crisis and need immediate respite and other supports to avoid exhaustion and possible harm to their elderly loved ones under their care. Without family caregivers, paid in-home services or nursing home care may be the only alternatives shifting substantial cost and burden to the state.

WHO ARE FAMILY CAREGIVERS?

- Adult children caring for an elderly parent, spouses caring for their spouse, and other relatives or friends caring for elderly loved ones. Approximately, 33,000 Alaskans provided 37 million hours of unpaid care to their adult family members in 2013. They provide assistance with feeding, dressing, bathing, and managing incontinence in addition to shopping, preparing meals, household chores, and nursing tasks. Caregiving has dramatically expanded in recent years and now include a broad array of nursing tasks such as giving injections, providing wound care, preparing special diets, and managing prescriptions. The majority of family caregivers receive little or no training to perform these tasks.
- Grandparents caring for grandchildren with parents who are not present in the household due to substance misuse, incarceration, health reasons, and other challenges. In Alaska, there are an estimated 7,089 grandparents who report they are responsible for the care of grandchildren living with them (American Community Survey, 2009-2013). Almost 12% of

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these grandparents live in poverty (U.S. Census 2010). Approximately, 1,598 Alaskan grandparents are responsible for the care of grandchildren living with them in the Anchorage Municipality (AARP 2014).

FAMILY CAREGIVERS SERVED IN FY2014 BY SERVICE TYPE

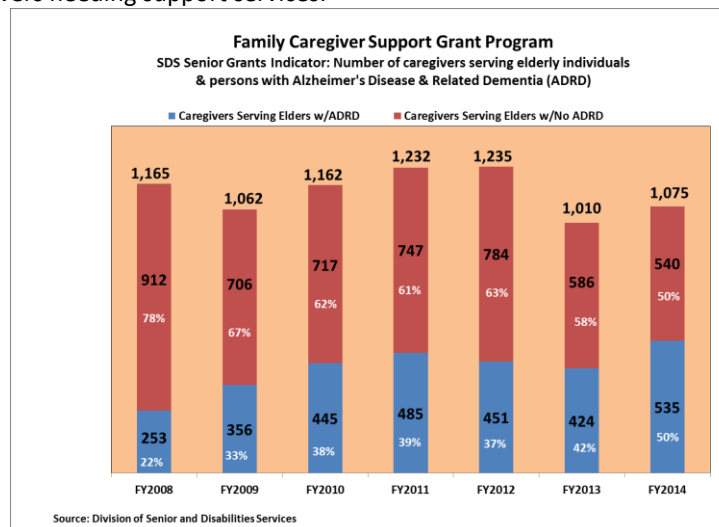
- In FY2013, nine providers served a total of 1,056 family caregivers of which 424 were caregivers of older people with dementia living at home and 46 were grandparents raising grandchildren.

HOW DO WE KNOW THESE SERVICES WORK?

- According to the U.S. Administration on Aging (2011), 41% of caregivers surveyed reported that without National Family Caregiver Support Services, the care recipient would not live in the same residence; 32% reported that the care recipient would be in an assisted living or nursing home.
- Based on national research findings, caregivers of persons with dementia reported that respite, training, counseling and peer support services helped to relieve caregiver stress and improved their response to behavior problems related to dementia enabling them to provide care at home on the average of one year or longer (Mittelman 2008; Gaugler, Reese & Mittelman 2013).
- Based on findings from the 2013 ADRD Family Caregiver Survey (n=54), 100% of respondents reported benefits from caregiver support services that helped to relieve caregiver depression, stress, and improved their quality of care.

WHY ARE ADDITIONAL FUNDS NEEDED?

- Family caregivers provide the foundation of care for older Alaskans. Family and other informal caregivers of older people with dementia have higher levels of stress and other health problems and utilize health care at higher levels than non-dementia caregivers. The Family Caregiver Supports program provides services that help caregivers maintain good health, avoid social isolation, and reduce the risk of exhaustion.
- Caregiving has dramatically expanded in recent years that now include a broad array of nursing tasks such as giving injections, providing wound care, preparing special diets, and managing prescriptions. Many family caregivers receive little or no training to perform these tasks and would benefit from specialized training.
- Alaska’s nursing homes are expensive – more than \$200,000 annually. If this increase was able to help only 2 caregivers care for their loved one at home one year longer, the increase recommended would more than pay for itself in nursing home savings.
- The Family Caregiver Program was established in Alaska following the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act in 2000. With the exception of a \$90,000 increase in FY09, state funding has been held at the same level since the program began more than a decade ago. In FY13, 171 fewer caregivers were served when comparing the numbers served in FY08 and FY13.
- Senior and Disabilities Services Senior Grants Unit projects that the funding recommendation is sufficient to eliminate the waitlist of 21 family caregivers needing support services.



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