



**Alaska Commission on Aging
Senior Advocacy Legislative Report
2014 Legislative Session**

This report describes legislation passed by the Alaska State Legislature in 2014 and includes bills and budget items of interest to Alaskan seniors and the Senior Advocate Community. These items were tracked and reported by the Alaska Commission on Aging during the Statewide Senior Legislative Advocacy teleconferences that occurred during session. A key of funding acronyms used can be found at the end of this report.

2014 BILLS PASSED

HB 263, Extend Alaska Senior Benefits Payment Program by Rep. Mike Hawker

The Senior Benefits program serves seniors age 65 and older who meet income eligibility requirements and provides a critical safety net for seniors needing financial assistance to afford basic life necessities such as food, housing, heating assistance, and prescriptions. This program served close to 11,000 seniors in FY2013. The average age of recipients was 75 years old with the oldest recipient being 103 years old. Almost two-thirds of the recipients were women. The original bill proposed a six-year extension but was amended by the Senate Finance Committee with a three-year sunset date, June 30, 2018.

SB 169, Statewide Immunization Program by Sen. Cathy Giessel

This legislation establishes a sustainable statewide immunization program using an innovative public-private partnership model to provide vaccines for Alaskans of all ages and creates a permanent solution to fill the fiscal gap of reduced federal funding for Alaska's immunization program. SB 169 was supported by ACoA and other senior advocates to maintain access to immunizations, including flu, pneumonia, and shingles for older adults who are low-income, not eligible for Medicare, and those receiving services from providers who do not accept Medicare. In addition, this program may help Alaskan grandparents raising grandchildren who have limited or no health insurance to afford vaccines for their grandchildren. Advocacy from the senior community in support of SB 169 was critical for preserving the adult vaccine program.

HB 60, Uniform Real Property Transfer on Death by Rep. Max Gruenberg

HB 60 allows for the transfer of property from the owner to their designated beneficiary at the time of the owner's death using a recorded deed of transfer that does not require probate or a will. This legislation provides a simple means to transfer property, is low-cost, and helps to minimize the stress of handling one's affairs.

SB 159, Air Ambulance Services by Sen. Bert Stedman

SB 159 directs the Division of Insurance to reinstate a regulatory exemption that allows air ambulance providers to offer Medevac services through an affordable membership program for Alaskans. Members who pay the monthly membership fees and need emergency critical care can be flown to treatment facilities without paying the actual cost of the flight. This legislation is particularly important for seniors and other Alaskans who live in rural and remote locations where levels of care are not locally available.

HB 301, Autopsies & Death by Rep. Bob Herron

This bill assists rural families who experience the unexpected death of a loved one that occurs outside of a medical facility. HB 301 amends current law that requires deaths occurring outside of a medical facility to be reported to the Medical Examiner’s Office in Anchorage and allows Tribal officials to use locally available technology to establish the cause of death and complete the death certificate form in consultation with the Medical Examiner’s Office. This legislation relieves the family’s financial burden by eliminating the cost for transporting the body to the Medical Examiner’s Office and assists families caring for elderly loved ones at home.

SB 135, Extend Alaska Health Care Commission (AHCC) by Sen. Donald Olson

Sunset for the Alaska Health Care Commission was extended for three years through June 30, 2017 by this bill. The purpose of AHCC is to increase understanding of Alaska’s health care system and to make policy recommendations to improve quality, affordability, and access to health care. ACoA supported SB 135 to improve quality health care for seniors who represent the largest health care consumer group of all age categories statewide.

FY2015 OPERATING BUDGET ITEMS

Nutrition, Transportation, and Supports Senior Community Grant Program, \$545,000 (\$345,000 GF and \$200,000 GF/MH) Increase to Base Funding, Division of Senior & Disabilities Services, Department of Health & Social Services

The Nutrition, Transportation & Supports (NTS) program serves seniors age 60 years and older targeting those whose health and welfare are at highest risk and require assistance to maintain their health and independence, but do not meet eligibility requirements for the Medicaid Waiver or Personal Care Assistance programs. The NTS program provides essential services including congregate meals served at senior centers, adult day programs and other congregate meal locations; home-delivered meals; transportation; and homemaker services. In FY2013, this program served more than 11,200 seniors throughout Alaska. According to the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, the additional funding will serve approximately 900 more seniors statewide.

Complex Behavior Collaborative, \$525,000 GF/MH Base Funding, Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Social Services

Funding will be used to continue the Complex Behavior Collaborative (CBC) as an ongoing program to support caregivers of vulnerable Alaskans with difficult to manage complex behaviors - including those with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias and co-occurring mental illness, serious mental illness, chronic addictions, developmental disabilities, and brain injury - who display challenging behaviors such as aggression, wandering, inappropriate sexual behavior, and self-harm. CBC services provide case-specific consultation, caregiver training, and technical assistance to reduce the need for institutional care and out-of-state placements.

Alaska Heating Assistance Program, Maintained \$2 Million GF, Division of Public Assistance, Department of Health and Social Services

This program provides support for paying heating expenses for income-eligible households and is particularly important for seniors on fixed incomes. In FY2013, this program served almost 13,700 income-eligible households of which more than 4,100 (31%) had an elderly member. The Legislature considered a \$2 million reduction for this program but added funding back in at the end of session with \$1 million State General Funds and \$1 million authorization for the State to receive Federal Funds.

Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), \$125,000 MHTAAR Funding, Division of Senior & Disabilities Services, Department of Health and Social Services

ADRCs provide information and options counseling for seniors, persons with disabilities, and family caregivers to obtain health care, financial support, housing, transportation, equipment and social services. This funding will support building capacity for the ADRCs.

Alaska SHARP Program, Loan Repayment, Division of Public Health, Department of Health and Social Services

The SHARP Program, created in 2012 by the Legislature, provides financial incentives to recruit and retain targeted health care professionals. Although the Legislature considered more than \$900,000 GF reduction for the program, the final legislative action resulted in a \$214,500 GF decrement to base funding.

FY2015 CAPITAL BUDGET FUNDING

Senior Citizen Housing Development Grant Fund, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, \$4.5 million GF

This housing grant program provides gap financing for new construction and renovation of senior housing projects in addition to funding for energy efficiency and accessibility improvements. For the past six years, this program has received the same level of funding despite the annual 7% increase in Alaska’s older adult population and subsequent need for additional senior housing.

Essential Program Equipment, \$ 500,000 (\$250,000 GF/MH, \$250,000 MHTAAR) Finance & Management Services, Department of Health and Social Services

The Essential Program Equipment program is an ongoing competitive capital grant program that provides agencies serving Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries with grants to purchase appliances, safety equipment, computers, and other equipment to ensure quality services. This was a joint advocacy priority for the four statutory advisory boards of the Trust that include the Alaska Mental Health Board, Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education, and the Alaska Commission on Aging.

Coordinated Transportation, \$1,050,000 (\$800,000 GF/MH, \$250,000 MHTAAR), Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

The Legislature approved \$1,050,000 for an ongoing capital program supporting coordinated transportation services. Funds are used for vehicle modification, maintenance and replacement to maintain accessible transportation in rural and urban communities. This funding may also be used as a source of match for federal funds received. Like the funds for Essential Program Equipment, funding for coordinated transportation services was a joint advocacy priority of the four statutory advisory boards.

OTHER CAPITAL FUNDS APPROVED

Pioneer Homes Deferred Maintenance, \$4 million GF, Division of Pioneer Homes, Department of Health and Social Services

The Governor submitted a \$4 million budget for Pioneer Home deferred maintenance, which was approved by the Legislature. The majority of projects address “life and safety” and “security” items for the six Pioneer Homes.

Senior Center Capital Projects, Total \$891,341 GF

Valdez Senior Center: Canopies for emergency egress	\$150,000
Catholic Community Services:	
Senior Center dishwasher, chairs, weatherization, & other improvements	\$ 64,000
Homer Senior Center: Natural gas conversion	\$100,000
Wasilla Area Seniors, Inc.: Facility upgrades & equipment	\$100,000
Senior Citizens of Kodiak, Inc.: Adult day patio & kitchen lighting	\$ 26,500
Cooper Landing Senior Center: Water drainage repair & improvements	\$ 50,000
Sterling Senior Center: Furniture, carpet & vehicle	\$100,841
Upper Susitna Seniors, Inc.: Emergency and wellness center addition	\$300,000

Funding Acronyms

GF refers to “General Funds,” a state funding source in the Operating Budget bill (HB 266, SB 120).

GF/MH refers to “General Funds/Mental Health,” a state funding source of general funds found in the Mental Health budget bill (HB 267/SB 121).

MHTAAR refers to a state funding source, “Mental Health Trust Authority Authorized Receipts.”