

Area of Focus: Healthcare



Healthcare

Alaskans have access to integrated healthcare options that promote optimal health, wellness, and self-sufficiency.

Objective 2.1: Alaskans have access to and receive quality integrated healthcare services.

Objective 2.2: Medicaid is efficiently managed and adequately resourced.

Objective 2.3: Trauma-informed, person-centered healthcare services are delivered.

Thriving communities depend on healthy residents. When Alaskans have access to quality healthcare, including behavioral health services across the state, they're more

likely to participate in work, school, cultural activities, and family life. This access helps prevent negative health outcomes and empowers Alaskans to live their best lives.

For many Trust beneficiaries, Medicaid is an integral access point for health, wellness, and independence within their home communities. As of September 2024, Medicaid served 251,055 Alaskans overall² (34.07% of Alaska's population based on the Department of Labor's 2023 estimated Alaska population of 736,812³) and of those, 72,359⁴ through Medicaid expansion.

While Medicaid's required services for healthcare

are critical, so are Medicaid's optional services. Both required and optional Medicaid services are essential to keep Alaskans in their home communities, affording them the opportunity to pursue meaningful lives.

Optional services can also supplant the need for costlier services; for example, home and community-based (optional) Medicaid waiver services are less costly than similar (mandatory) services provided in institutional settings.

MEDICAID IN THE UNITED STATES:

A federal and state program that helps with medical costs for some people with limited income and resources.

[*Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services*](#)¹

OPTIONAL MEDICAID SERVICES:

Benefits that states may cover if they choose.

[*Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services — Mandatory & Optional Medicaid Benefits*](#)⁵

Alaska's Medicaid system has undergone many changes in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic altered how services are offered and delivered, including expanding the use of telehealth. In 2022, the Department of Health and Social Services was reorganized into the DOH and DFCS. Key changes include extending postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to 12 months and increasing the income limit for postpartum coverage, both effective February 1, 2024. The Diagnosis Related Groups (DRG) methodology was implemented on January 1, 2024, to base reimbursement to facilities on patient acuity rather than the length of stay. The state's 1115 Behavioral Health Reform Medicaid Waiver, approved for extension through December 31, 2028, continues to be implemented.

DOH is also enhancing access to services through various initiatives. Legislation (SB 57 Adult Home Care), passed in 2023, allows Alaskans to care for family members while providing financial support to offset care costs. Efforts are being made to reduce the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Medicaid Waiver waitlist. DOH has established the Complex Behavior Collaborative to support individuals with high behavioral health needs. A multi-year comprehensive review of Medicaid payment methodologies has been initiated. Furthermore, DOH is working to increase access to Medicaid School-Based Services (SBS) through legislative authority, HB344, that allows Medicaid coverage for SBS services beyond those outlined in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for all Medicaid-enrolled children. DOH sought and received legislative authorization through HB344 to apply for a new 1115 Behavioral Health Reform Medicaid Waiver, aimed at addressing the unmet health-related needs of Medicaid beneficiaries. Health related needs must be medically necessary and some are time limited.

While Medicaid serves a significant portion of Alaska's population, ensuring timely and meaningful access across all regions remains a challenge.

Medicare is the leading insurance coverage for older Alaskans. Due to the low reimbursement rates with Medicare, many clinics have been unwilling to accept patients, resulting in many seniors utilizing community health centers or urgent care

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facilities for general primary care and preventative services. Receiving services in these settings does not guarantee that a patient will be seen by the same healthcare provider each visit, causing challenges for the patient, healthcare provider, and clinic. According to the [2030 Healthy Alaskans Scorecard⁶](#), as of 2023, the percentage of population without health insurance is improving, but still has not reached the target of 11.3%.

Most importantly, all Alaskans, no matter their medical insurance, should have access to necessary medical and behavioral health services at a reasonable rate.

Objective 2.1: Alaskans have access to and receive quality integrated healthcare services.

QUALITY OF CARE:

Is the degree to which health services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are consistent with evidence-based professional knowledge. Quality health care services should be effective, safe, people-centered and must be timely, equitable, integrated, and efficient.

[World Health Organization — Quality of Care⁷](#)

- e. **Strategy:** Facilitate guidance, resources, and flexibility to enable Trust beneficiaries and all Alaskans to access competitive, affordable insurance options.

- a. **Strategy:** Support an increase in the number of healthcare access points to expand the availability of services to underserved, disadvantaged, geographically isolated, and special needs population.
- b. **Strategy:** The state-funded healthcare system has the capacity and strength to provide timely access to appropriate levels of high-quality, person-centered care for Alaskans in their region or communities of choice.
- c. **Strategy:** Expand upon, leverage, and navigate service options of healthcare to Alaskans.
- d. **Strategy:** Provide to all eligible Alaskans access and oversight to the full range of appropriate and affordable healthcare.

- f. **Strategy:** Identify investments and provide technical assistance to communities and organizations that address the needs of vulnerable populations and promote quality improvement activities that increase access to health care services.

Objective 2.2: Medicaid is efficiently managed and adequately resourced.

- a. **Strategy:** Maintain funding for Medicaid services.
- b. **Strategy:** Expand care across the State with new waiver demonstration projects while maintaining ongoing 1115 Behavioral Health Reform Medicaid Waiver supports.
- c. **Strategy:** Expand Medicaid administrative claiming for the proper and efficient administration of Medicaid.
- d. **Strategy:** Bolster Medicaid program integrity efforts.
- e. **Strategy:** Support Medicaid as the payer of last resort.
- f. **Strategy:** Provide technical assistance to safety net providers to ensure their financial and operational health and sustainability.
- g. **Strategy:** Enhance coordination for Alaskans who are dually eligible for Medicaid and Medicare to improve health outcomes and reduce costs.
- h. **Strategy:** Foster Medicaid innovation by implementing pilot programs to improve service delivery and patient outcomes.

PERSON-CENTERED CARE:

Integrated health care services delivered in a setting and manner that is responsive to individuals and their goals, values and preferences, in a system that supports good provider-patient communication and empowers individuals receiving care and providers to make effective care plans together.

[Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services — Person-Centered Care⁸](#)

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Objective 2.3: Trauma-informed, person-centered healthcare services are delivered.

- a. **Strategy:** Support multi-disciplinary teams to provide continued level of services needed.
- b. **Strategy:** Quality, comprehensive maternal health services are robust and readily available.
- c. **Strategy:** Continue promoting the implementation of screenings and early interventions across the healthcare system.
- d. **Strategy:** Support and promote access to [Complex Behavior Collaborative](#)⁹ services through a tiered level of services.
- e. **Strategy:** Comprehensive and coordinated services for seniors and individuals with disabilities including long-term services, palliative care, and end of life care are available.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. <https://www.medicaid.gov/>
- 2 Medicaid served 251,055 Alaskans overall. <https://health.alaska.gov/healthyalaska/pages/dashboard.aspx>
- 3 Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development estimated Alaska's population. <https://live.laborstats.alaska.gov/data-pages/alaska-population-estimates>

- 4 72,359 Alaskans are served through Medicaid expansion. <https://health.alaska.gov/healthyalaska/pages/dashboard.aspx>
- 5 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services — Mandatory & Optional Medicaid Benefits. <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/benefits/mandatory-optional-medicaid-benefits/index.html>
- 6 2030 Healthy Alaskans Scorecard. https://www.healthyalaskans.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/HA2030_12_11_23.html
- 7 World Health Organization — Quality of Care. https://www.who.int/health-topics/quality-of-care#tab=tab_1
- 8 Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services — Person-Centered Care. <https://www.cms.gov/priorities/innovation/key-concepts/person-centered-care>
- 9 Complex Behavior Collaborative. <https://health.alaska.gov/dbh/Pages/ComplexBehavior/default.aspx>