

Alaska Commission on Aging Annual Report

FISCAL YEAR 2023

The Alaska Commission on Aging

“The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure the dignity and independence of all older Alaskans, and to assist them to lead useful and meaningful lives through planning, advocacy, education, and interagency cooperation.”

Established by Alaska statute in 1981, the commission:

- *Advocates* for the needs and concerns of older Alaskans to the Governor, Legislature, Congressional delegation, and the public.
- *Advises* the Governor, Legislature, Congressional delegation and the public on current and potential programs and services for older Alaskans and their caregivers.
- *Provides recommendations* to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority on programs and services to improve the lives of senior Trust beneficiaries

Commission Members

The ACoA is comprised of eleven members:

- Seven public members of senior age who are appointed by the Governor to serve four-year terms.
- Four designated seats for the Department of Health, the Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development, the Chair of the Pioneer Home Advisory Board, and a senior services provider.

Bob Sivertsen, Public Member, Chair, Ketchikan

Paula Pawlowski, Public Member, Vice-Chair, Anchorage

Nona Safra, Public Member, Homer

Jan Engan, Public Member, Palmer

Bob Pawlowski, Pioneer Home Advisory Board Chair, Anchorage

Pamela Samash, Public Member, Nenana

Darlene Supplee, Senior Service Provider, Fairbanks

Anthony Newman, Department of Health, Juneau

Lisa Von Bargen, Department of Commerce, Anchorage

Advocacy and Outreach

In 2023, The Alaska Commission on Aging visited the following locations:

- Nome
- Utqiagvik (Barrow)
- Seward
- Kodiak
- Dillingham

Purpose:

- Listen to seniors and elders
- Make observations of the communities' services and facilities for seniors
- Share this information with the Commission and stakeholders



Advocacy and Outreach

NOME

Nome

Norton Sound Health Corporation Programs: Christine manages eight programs focusing on senior needs, housing, and office space at Norton Sound Health Corporation, which includes a hotel, maternity facility, Medicaid waiver programs, and health aide employment, yet they face challenges in meeting expectations within resource limits.

Elder Housing and Home-Health Issues: Significant challenges for the organization include inadequate elder housing in villages, insufficient home-health services, the lack of assisted living facilities, and environmental health issues such as mold and bed bugs.

Insights from Sara Lizak and XYZ Senior Center: Conversations with Sara Lizak and Butch Palmero from XYZ Senior Center highlighted their operational needs, with Butch emphasizing the necessity of comprehensive funding to lessen the administrative burden, and the center's commitment to feeding and providing activities for seniors, as well as its partnership with homeless shelters and transparency.

Community Dialogues with Inupiat and Nome Residents: Engagements with Inupiat individuals and Nome community members brought to light historical issues related to statehood and federal land management, local grievances with property owners, and broader societal challenges, all underscored through personal community stories.



Advocacy and Outreach

UTQIAGVIK (BARROW)

Utqiagvik (Barrow)

Remote Senior Care Obstacles: In places like Utqiagvik, senior care is hindered by staffing shortages, maintenance problems, and infrastructure deficiencies, underscoring the importance of traditional support and advocacy.

Importance of Hub Communities: For information access and service delivery, hub communities are vital. Successful outreach in these areas requires connections with key community members and an understanding of the local pace and seasonal lifestyle.

Community Engagement Timing: Planning for North Slope community engagement must account for the timing of critical local activities such as whale harvests, seal hunting, and seasonal subsistence activities, which significantly impact availability and participation.

Utqiagvik Senior Center Issues: The senior center in Utqiagvik struggles with staffing, ongoing maintenance, and infrastructural constraints, exacerbated by the absence of maintenance personnel, lack of tools, and the annual barge schedule impacting supplies and planning.

Strategic Observations: There is a clear need for better-coordinated care, technological enhancements, and strong advocacy for seniors, with a focus on adapting state programs to the unique demands of remote communities and ensuring future outreach is thoughtfully planned.



Advocacy and Outreach

SEWARD

Seward

Seward Senior Center Operations: Hosted by Executive Director Dana Paperman, the Seward Senior Center, supported by the City of Seward, the State of Alaska, and other partners, offers daily nutrition services and a Meals on Wheels program, with Executive Chef Todd Mashlan overseeing senior lunches.

Nutrition and Health Initiatives: The center provides a dining service from noon to 1:00 pm, publishes the Resurrection Tidings newsletter detailing service updates and fall prevention, and offers a thrice-daily Health and Fitness program.

Commission Meeting Outcomes: Recent discussions covered senior service updates, ACL and governmental initiatives with insights from Louise Ryan, and a presentation on healthcare by analyst Grace Beaujean, offering valuable sector data.

Providence's Mountain Haven Facility Tour: The Commission's tour of Providence's Mountain Haven Assisted Living emphasized its high-quality, family-style living with private spaces, complemented by insights on state-wide senior and disability services from Tony Newman, with talks on expanding the board to include a labor representative.



Advocacy and Outreach

KODIAK

Kodiak

50th Anniversary of Kodiak's Senior Center: The Alaska Commission on Aging attended the 50th anniversary of the Kodiak Senior Center, which also honored Pat Branson's retirement after 35 years. The celebration marked the center's fifth accolade from the National Institute of Senior Centers.

ACoA Acknowledgement: An ACoA representative was selected to recognize the center's long-standing service and to discuss future collaborations, including a proposed senior-focused podcast with the retiring director, Pat Branson.

Celebration Ceremony: Despite poor weather, the event was well-attended, featuring commendations from Senator Gary Stevens, Representative Louise Stutes, and Mayor Scott Arndt, and culminating with an ACoA speech that highlighted the center's impact and Pat Branson's contributions.

Pat Branson's Farewell and Legacy: In her farewell, Pat Branson recounted the center's history and acknowledged the pivotal role of her dedicated team in serving the Kodiak senior community over the years.



Advocacy and Outreach

DILLINGHAM

Dillingham

Senior Population and Services: Dillingham, home to 2,300 residents, serves approximately 216 seniors locally and 1,138 regionally, including 779 Alaska Natives. The 2019 closure of Grandma's Place, an assisted living facility, has compelled those needing extensive care to relocate to Anchorage.

High Living Costs: Dillingham's seniors face high costs with basic grocery items, \$6.35 per gallon for gasoline, and \$6.59 for heating oil. Electricity costs average at \$0.54 per kilowatt-hour, leading to a high average monthly bill and reliance on subsistence hunting and fishing.

Healthcare and Infrastructure: Healthcare is hindered by Medicaid travel restrictions and a lack of mental health and senior care beds, exacerbated by the potential sale of Grandma's Place and the resulting gap in local senior care services.

Winter and Transport Hurdles: Winter brings challenges in snow clearance affecting meal and heating oil deliveries, and air travel dependency poses risks for medical emergencies and mail delivery due to frequent weather-related cancellations.

ACoA Recommendations: It's suggested to advocate for reopening an assisted living facility, potentially utilizing the defunct Grandma's Place with support from the Bristol Bay Native Association, and to address the Medicaid travel issues to improve medical access for seniors in Dillingham and its vicinities.



Fairbanks meeting
(and listening
sessions) in May of
2022

Southeast Visits to
Pioneer Homes in
September of 2022

Anchorage and
Mat-Su Listening
Session in October
of 2022

Kodiak Listening
Session in
November of 2022



Fairbanks Listening Sessions 2022

Top areas of concern:

- Transportation services
- Affordable housing
- Support services (in home)
- Availability of assisted living
- Food insecurity / physical activity



Mat-Su Listening Sessions 2022

Top areas of concern:

1. Transportation services
2. Affordable housing
3. Access to information
4. Inflation
5. Food insecurity / physical activity



Anchorage Listening Sessions 2022

Top areas of concern:

- Affordable housing
- Support services (in home)
- Transportation services
- Cost of living increases (inflation)
- Financial abuse / exploitation

Top 5 Areas of Concern

- Senior housing
- Cost and availability of assisted living
- Help with shopping and chores
- Transportation
- Availability of health care with geriatric training

Older American's Month – Communities of Strength

Alaska Commission on Aging – Listening Sessions – May 5, 2021

Please share an example of how seniors on the Kenai Peninsula have demonstrated that they are **Communities of Strength!**

1. Thinking about the past year:

- a. what are some positive things that happened?
- b. what are some challenges you, your friends and family have experienced?
- c. what resources and assistance did you receive? how was it helpful?
- d. what additional assistance would have been helpful?

2. Which areas should be our focus over the next 5 years?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Food insecurity | Opportunity for physical activity |
| Housing | Cost of Assisted Living |
| Caregiver support | Availability of Senior Housing |
| Loved one with dementia | Home Maintenance |
| Transportation | Home Modifications |
| In-home support | Help with Medicare |
| Availability of health care | Elder Abuse |
| Information about resources | Help with shopping and chores |
| Personal Income | Loss of vision |
| Job Opportunities | Loss of hearing |
| Substance Abuse Treatment | Opportunity for physical activity |
| Mental Health Treatment | |
| Raising Grandchildren | |

Elder Listening Sessions – Areas for Improvement

Feeling disconnected from community/feeling isolated

Help navigating Medicare paperwork and requirements

Transportation services

Support for elders raising grandchildren

Adjusting to the increased cost of living

Access to reliable and affordable internet

Need for additional caregivers and support for existing caregivers (informal and formal)

Affordable housing and home modifications/maintenance

Requested additional support when transitioning between levels of care

Elder Listening Sessions – What's Working Well

Senior Voice publication (paper copies appreciated)

Partnerships with community organizations and youth programs

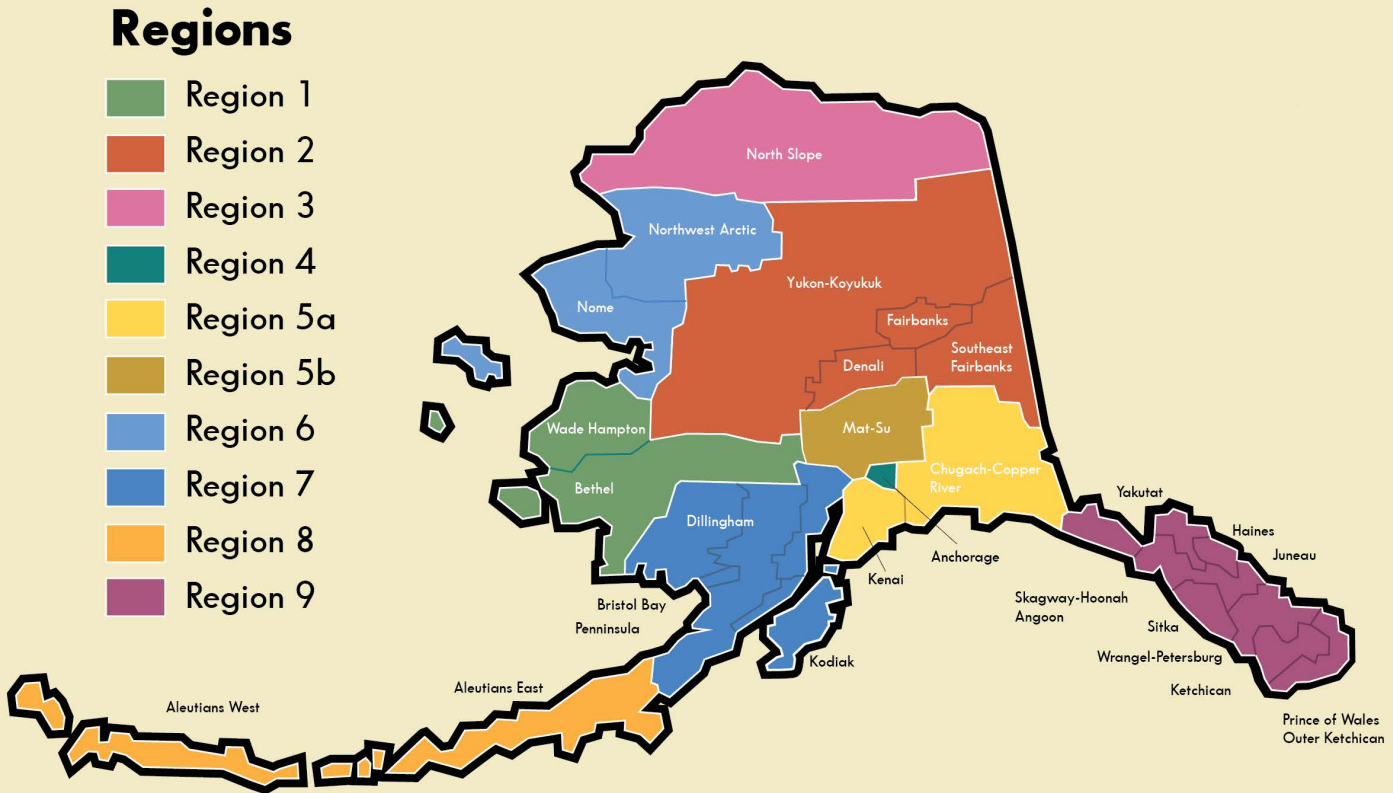
Expanded food delivery programs

Emergency readiness kits for seniors

The return of group activities for seniors (fitness, meals, social events, etc.)

Volunteer opportunities for seniors

Map of Department of Health Services Regions



Department of Health - Service Regions



List of Department of Health Services Regions

- **Region 1**
 - Bethel
 - Wade Hampton
- **Region 2**
 - Denali
 - Fairbanks
 - Southeast Fairbanks
 - Yukon-Koyukuk
- **Region 3**
 - North Slope
- **Region 4**
 - Anchorage
- **Region 5a**
 - Chugach
 - Copper River
 - Kenai
- **Region 5b**
 - Mat-Su
- **Region 6**
 - Nome
 - Northwest Arctic
- **Region 7**
 - Bristol Bay
 - Dillingham
 - Kodiak
 - Lake & Peninsula
- **Region 8**
 - Aleutians East
 - Aleutians West
- **Region 9**
 - Haines
 - Juneau
 - Ketchikan
 - Prince of Wales-Outer Ketchikan
 - Sitka
 - Skagway-Hoonah-Angoon
 - Wrangell-Petersburg
 - Yakutat

What is the Alaska State Plan for Senior Services?

Satisfies a federal requirement for all states receiving federal funds under the Older Americans Act for their senior programs and services.

Vision statement along with a core set of goals, objectives, strategies, performance measures, and an intrastate funding formula.

Alaska's plan is a four-year comprehensive plan for senior services including: Meals, transportation, homemaker and family caregiver, services safety and protection, adult day, senior housing, vocational training, legal assistance, and more.

The previous plan expired on September 30, 2023.

Methodology

Senior Survey (n=5,943)

- Targeted survey for Alaskans over the age of 60
- Used to learn about priorities from a senior perspective

Elder Listening Sessions

- Over twenty facilitated conversations with Seniors
- (Delta Junction, Fairbanks, Nenana, North Pole, Salcha, Nikiski, Kenai, Sterling, Soldotna, Ninilchik, Homer, Anchor Point, Kodiak, Sitka, Ketchikan, and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and Anchorage)
- Discussions to identify what is and isn't working for seniors in Alaskan Communities.

Provider Survey (n=90)

- Targeted survey for community-based service provider agencies and community health centers
- Demonstrate the needs and considerations of service providers

Senior Survey - Key Findings

WHAT CONCERNS YOU MOST ABOUT AGING IN ALASKA?

	2014 Survey	2018 Survey	2022 Survey
1	Access to health care	Access to health care	Access to health care
2	Financial security	Financial security	Financial security
3	Affordable, accessible housing	Maintaining physical health	Maintaining physical health
4	Having enough food to eat	Affordable, accessible housing	Fuel Costs
5	Fuel costs	Ability of in-home long term support services	Transportation

Source: Alaska Commission on Aging Senior Survey Results 2022, 2018, 2014

Provider Survey - Key Findings (n=90)

Most important senior services that are missing or insufficient in provider service areas

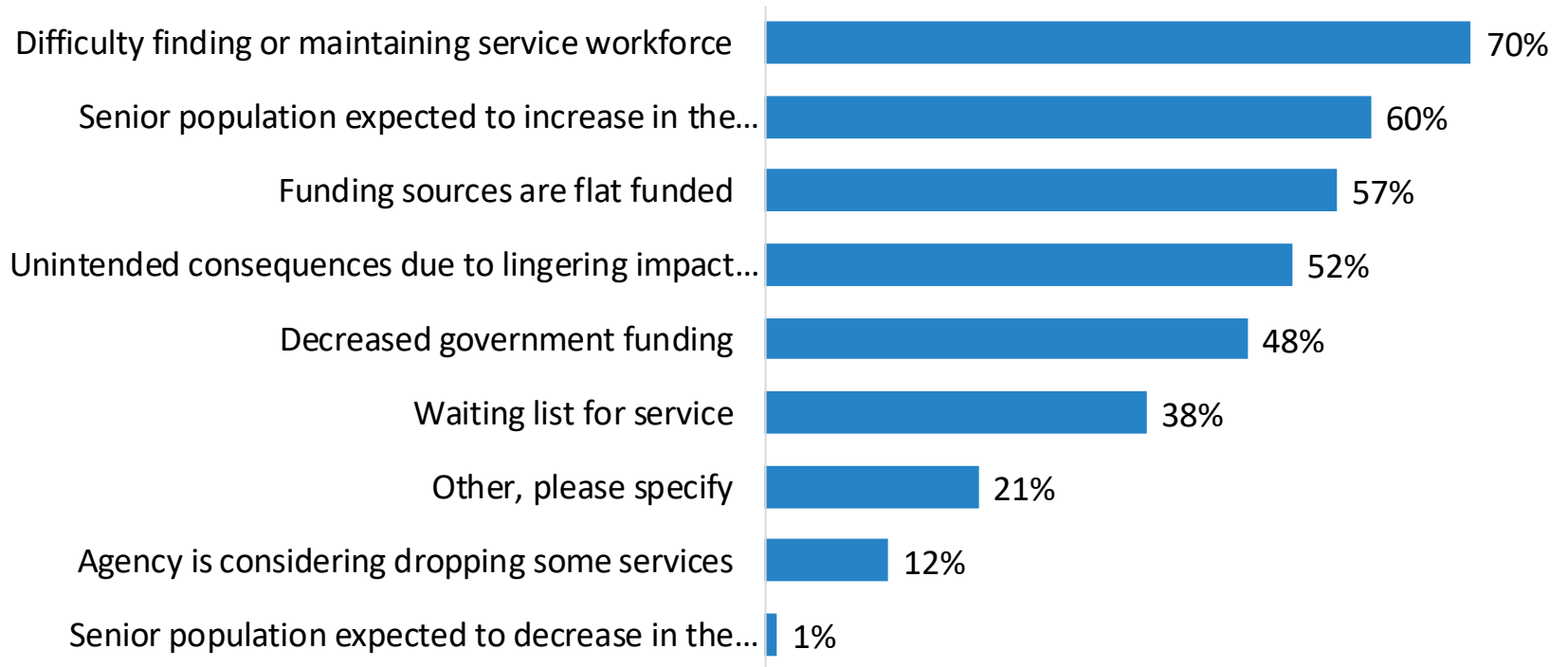
- Independent senior housing
- Assisted transportation
- Assisted living
- Family caregiver supports

Providers made the following changes to services during the pandemic to continue services, support participants and address social isolation

- Made available assistive technology to participants
- Used, reviewed and updated emergency preparedness plans
- Wellness checks
- Drive in meal services

2018 Survey:

- Assisted transportation
- Independent senior housing
- Behavioral mental health services for older adults
- Family caregiver support



Barriers to Service

Source: Alaska Commission on Aging 2022
Provider Survey

Overarching Goals for FY2024 – 2027

1. Promote healthy aging in place and provide access to comprehensive and integrated health care.
2. Encourage seniors to be financially secure.
3. Foster the protection of vulnerable seniors from abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and exploitation in home, community, and long-term care facilities.
4. Promote improved access for seniors to quality, affordable, accessible, safe, and appropriate housing, including senior housing, across the continuum of care.
5. Promote opportunities for meaningful aging, intergenerational connectivity, and civic engagement and address the impacts from social isolation, particularly due to COVID-19.
6. Promote person-centered, quality and affordable home-based and community-based long-term support services to provide seniors with the highest quality of life, targeted to individuals with the greatest economic and social need.
7. Promote opportunities to support family caregivers to provide care and support to seniors without putting their own physical, emotional, and financial well-being on hold and at risk.

**ALASKA INTRASTATE FUNDING FORMULA
WEIGHT FACTORS, POPULATION STATISTICS, AND FEDERAL ALLOCATIONS**

	Senior Population Factor (60+)	Frail Population Factor (80+)	Minority Population Factor	Poverty Population Factor	Rural Population Factor	Weighted Percentage	Projected Allocation
Percentage Weight Factors	12.5%	25.0%	12.5%	27.5%	22.5%	(%)	(\$)
Bethel Census Area	2,472 ^[2]	225 ^[3]	1,955 ^[4]	254 ^[5]	2,472 ^[6]	3.3%	\$146,377.12
Kusilvak Census Area	919	72	795	86	919	1.2%	\$54,808.13
Region 1 Total	3,391	297	2,750	340	3,391	4.5%	\$201,185.25
Denali Borough	409	45	62	2	409	0.4%	\$19,273.32
Fairbanks North Star B	18,783	1,945	2,719	832	0	9.0%	\$403,093.11
Southeast Fairbanks	1,655	209	274	58	1,655	1.8%	\$80,753.67
Yukon-Koyukuk	1,334	157	877	106	1,334	1.7%	\$76,397.33
Region 2 Total	22,181	2,356	3,932	998	3,398	12.9%	\$579,517.42
North Slope	1,263	54	834	67	1,263	1.5%	\$68,496.10
Region 3 Total	1,263	54	834	67	1,263	1.5%	\$68,496.10
Anchorage	56,875	6,874	12,821	2,204	0	29.1%	\$1,307,387.27
Region 4 Total	56,875	6,874	12,821	2,204	0	29.1%	\$1,307,387.27
Kenai Peninsula	17,170	1,998	1,575	364	8,585	12.8%	\$577,411.81
Chugach	1,562	120	338	39	1,562	1.7%	\$74,590.82
Copper River	767	63	161	25	767	0.8%	\$36,864.52
Region 5A Total	19,499	2,181	2,074	428	10,914	15.3%	\$688,867.14
Matanuska-Susitna	23,224	2,371	2,054	1,151	0	10.7%	\$482,013.62
Region 5B Total	23,224	2,371	2,054	1,151	0	10.7%	\$482,013.62
Aleutian Islands East	627	30	458	17	627	0.8%	\$34,219.91
Aleutian Islands West	861	22	566	36	861	1.0%	\$45,902.96
Region 6 Total	1,488	52	1,024	53	1,488	1.8%	\$80,122.87
Bristol Bay Borough	222	21	106	3	222	0.3%	\$11,493.51
Dillingham	836	88	602	39	836	1.1%	\$47,451.81
Kodiak Island	2,630	269	1,119	97	1,315	2.3%	\$101,688.37
Lake and Peninsula	278	18	194	7	278	0.3%	\$15,159.82
Region 7 Total	3,966	396	2,021	146	2,651	3.9%	\$175,793.51
Nome Census-Area	1,395	118	1,005	133	1,395	1.8%	\$80,546.36
Northwest Arctic	1,018	110	792	55	1,018	1.3%	\$58,983.82
Region 8 Total	2,413	228	1,797	188	2,413	3.1%	\$139,530.18
Haines Borough	878	107	129	110	878	1.0%	\$45,064.86
Juneau Borough	7,472	828	1,471	121	3,736	5.8%	\$260,462.26
Ketchikan Borough	3,520	378	832	132	1,760	2.8%	\$126,846.16
Prince of Wales	1,518	127	584	87	1,518	1.7%	\$78,180.14
Sitka Borough	2,220	339	566	49	2,220	2.5%	\$112,059.48
Skagway	278	31	28	3	278	0.3%	\$12,956.48
Hoonah-Angoon	847	91	331	43	847	1.0%	\$44,114.22
Petersburg	1,019	119	137	19	1,019	1.1%	\$48,420.22
Wrangell	736	96	149	24	736	0.8%	\$36,346.26
Yakutat Borough	179	27	89	0	179	0.2%	\$9,538.93
Region 9 Total	18,667	2,143	4,316	588	13,171	17.2%	\$773,988.99
Region 10 Statewide ^[1]							\$273,840.65
Totals:	152,967	16,952	33,623	6,163	38,689	100%	\$4,496,902.35

Legislative Audit

- Completed audit in FY23 with overwhelmingly positive outcomes.
- Division of Legislative Audit affirmed ACOA's crucial support for older Alaskans through advocacy, outreach, and education.
- Recommended extending ACOA's termination date to June 30, 2032, highlighting the commission's importance.
- Audit reinforces ACOA's effectiveness and commitment to enhancing the quality of life for Alaska's aging population.

Teleconferences

- Initiated quarterly teleconferences to address key issues affecting seniors.
- First teleconference focused on NTS (Nutrition, Transportation, and Support Services), providing a platform for expert insights and public engagement.
- Second teleconference covered housing, offering an opportunity for expert education and discussion on senior housing challenges and solutions.
- These teleconferences serve as a valuable forum for the Commission on Aging, experts, and the public to collaborate on enhancing senior welfare.

Alaska's Senior Population Demographics

Alaska has the fastest growing senior population per capita in the nation.

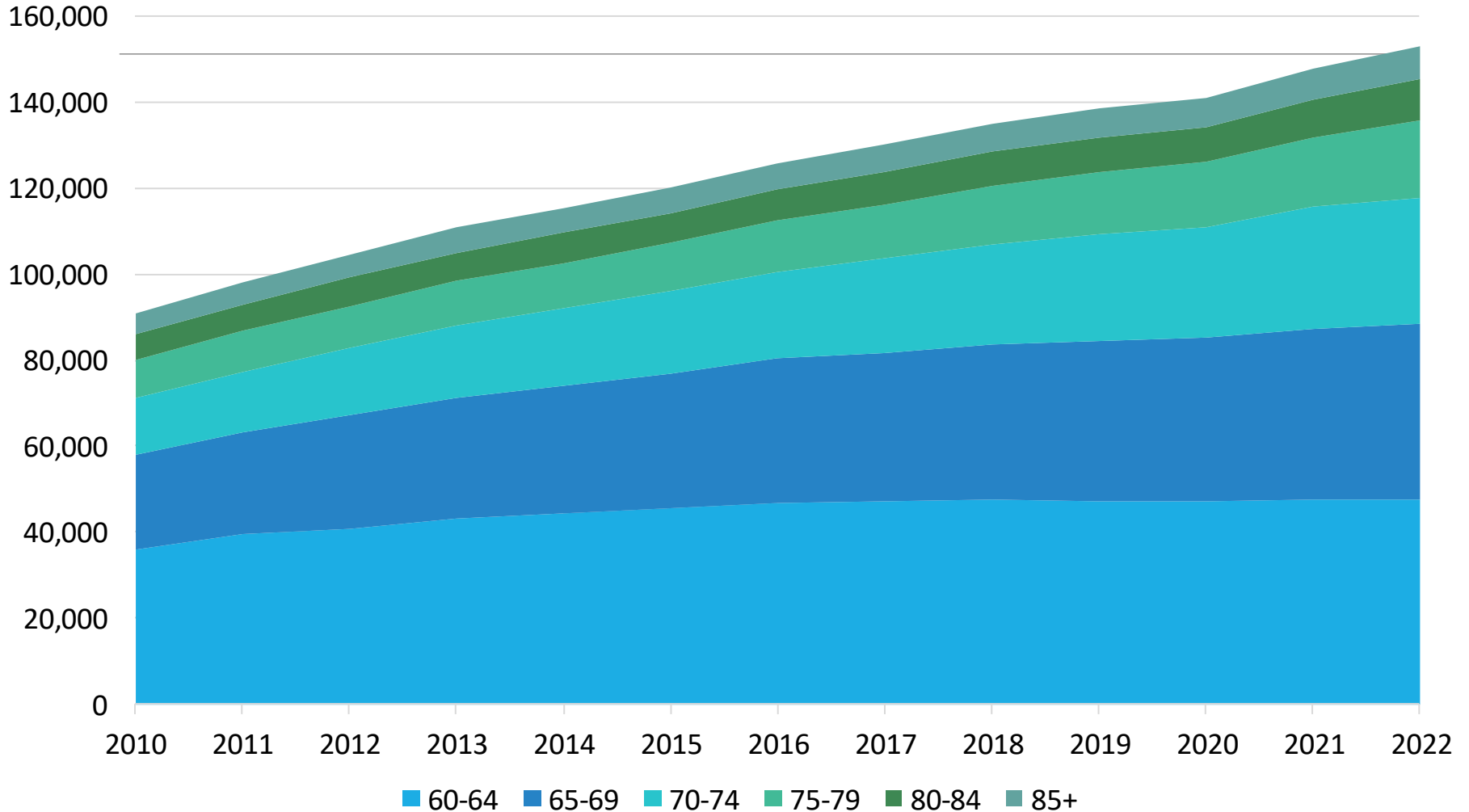
Alaska's senior population increased 68% between 2010 and 2022.

20% of Alaskans are aged 60 and over.

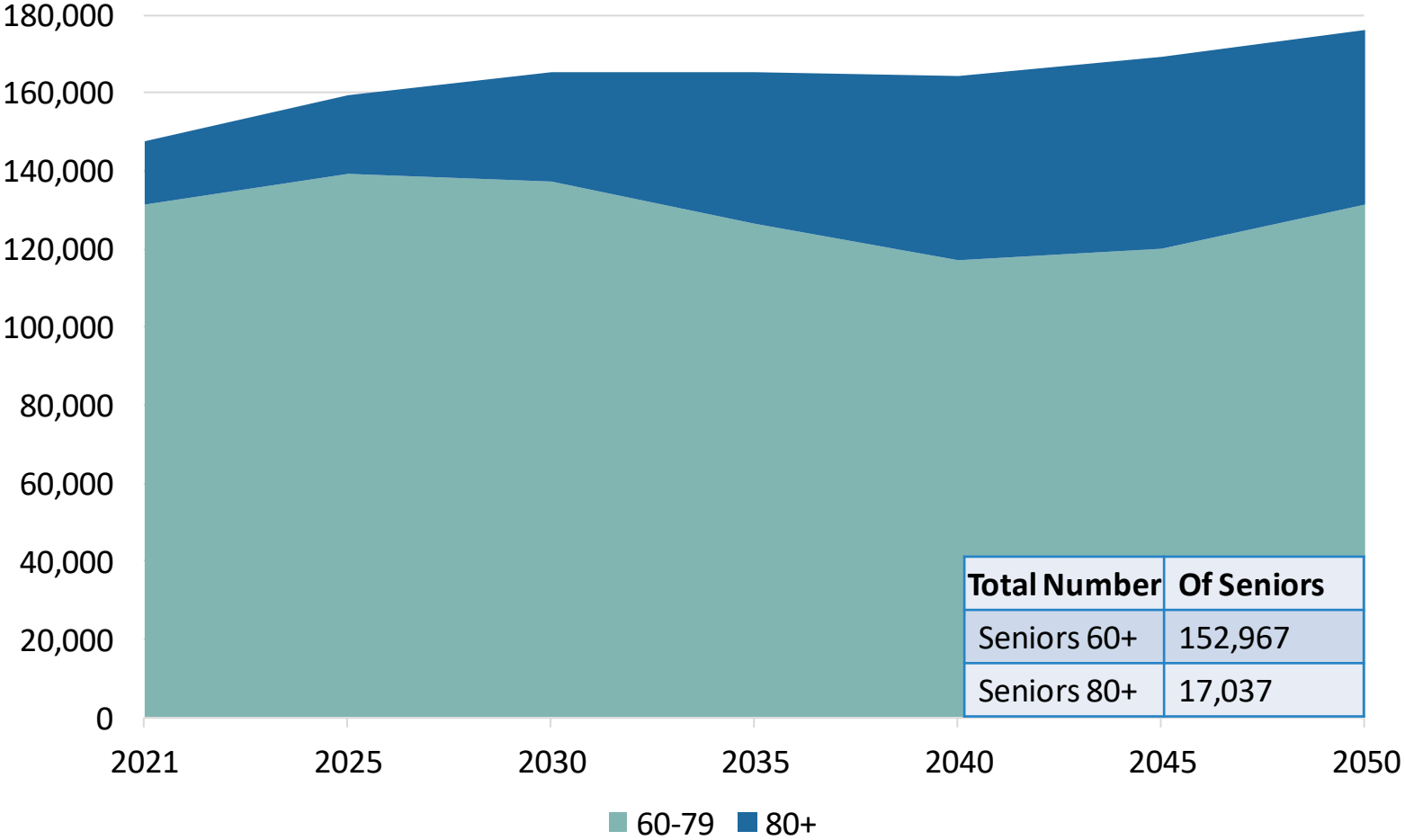
The proportion of Alaskan's 80+ years is expected to grow over the next several decades.

2010-2022 Senior Population

Population 60+ Average Annual Growth Rate 2010 – 2022: 6%



Alaska's Senior Population Forecast



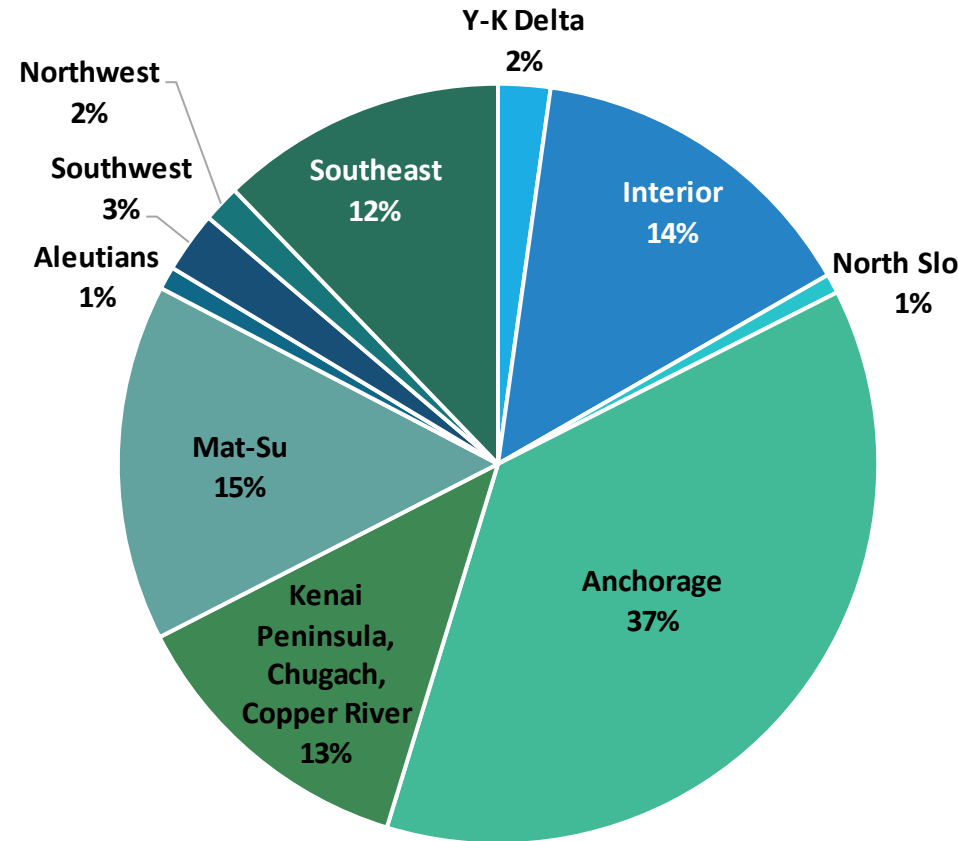
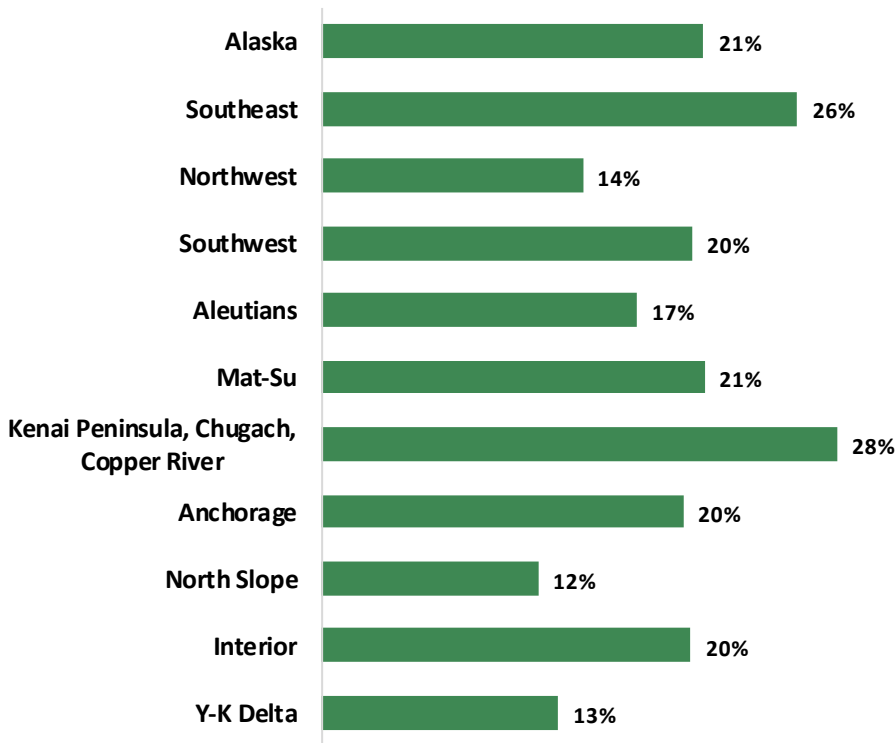
Total Number	Of Seniors
Seniors 60+	152,967
Seniors 80+	17,037

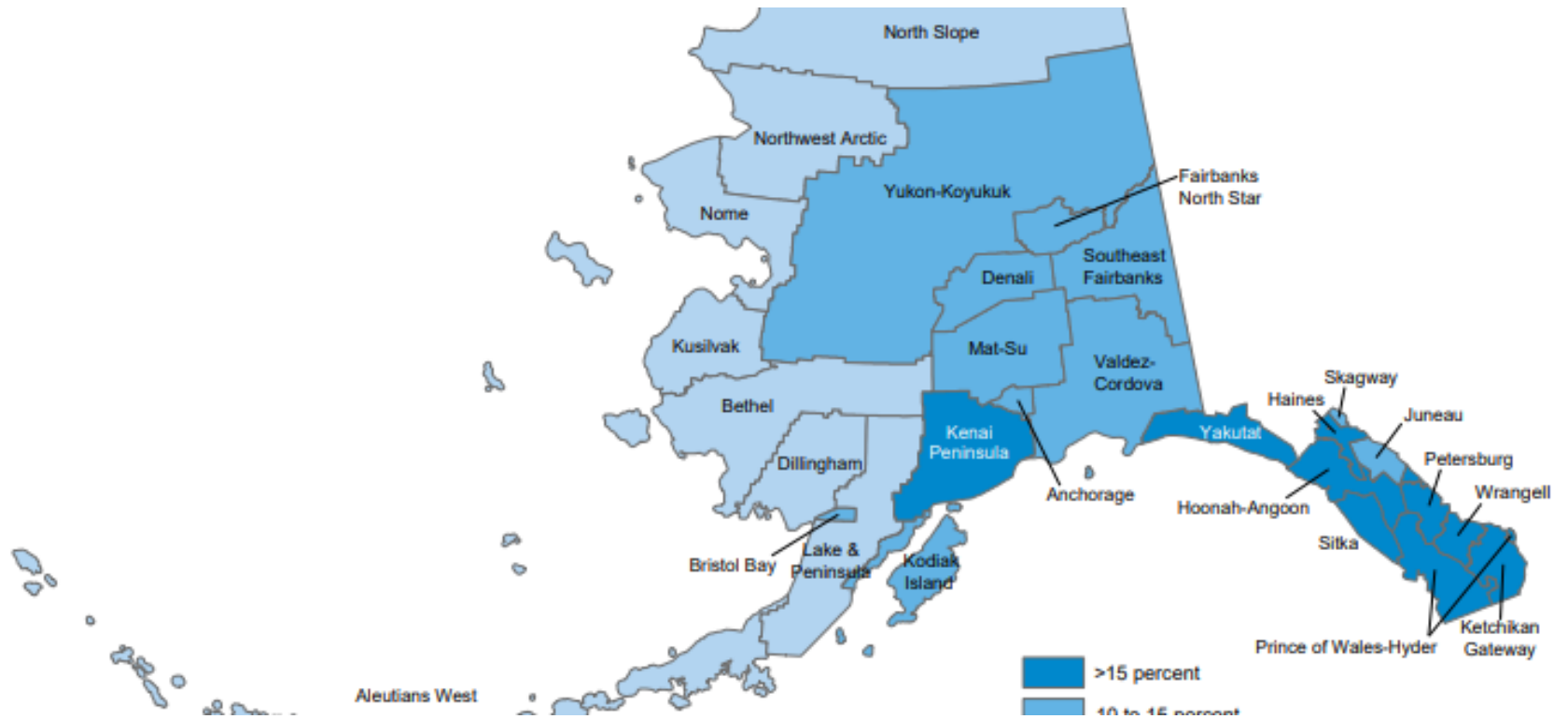
Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development Population Forecasts, 2021-2050

Alaska's Senior Population in 2022

Percent of All Seniors 60+ by Region

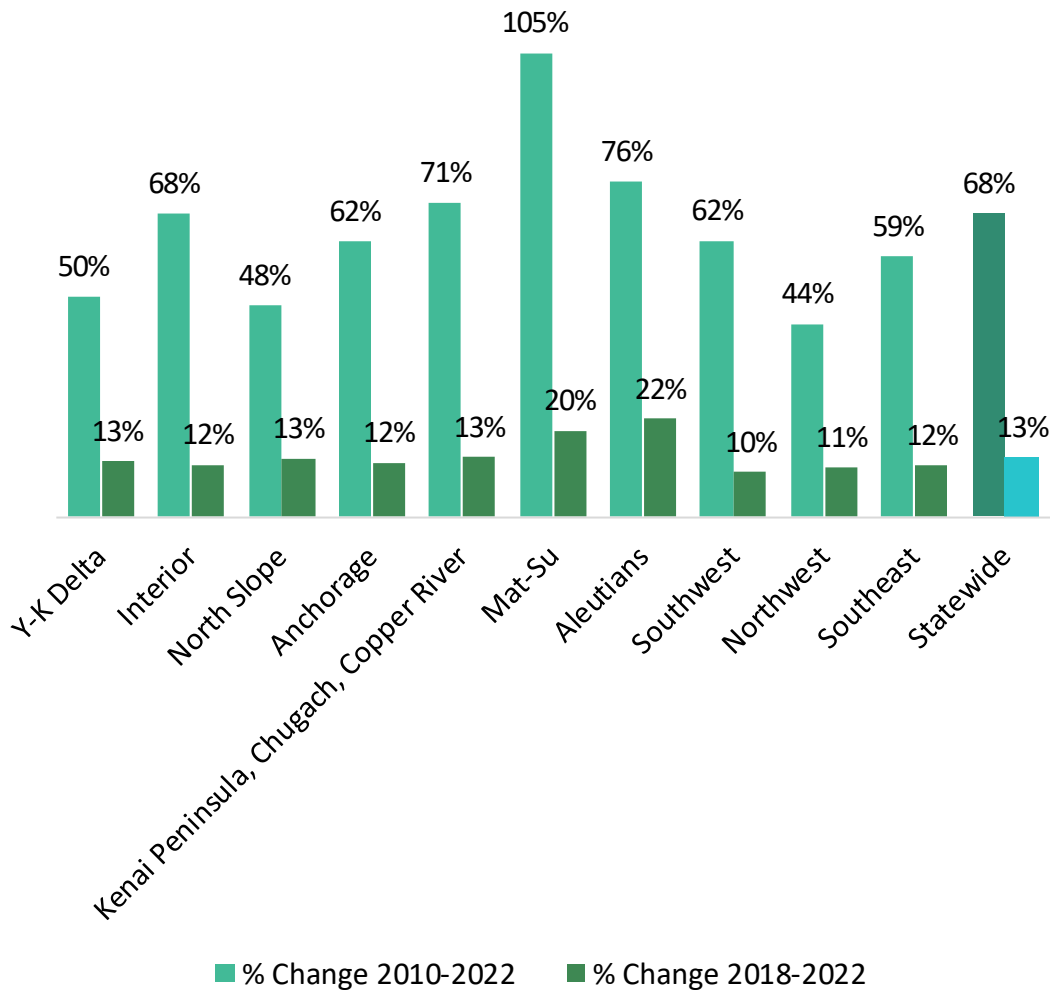
% of Total Population 60+





Relative percent of seniors varies by region

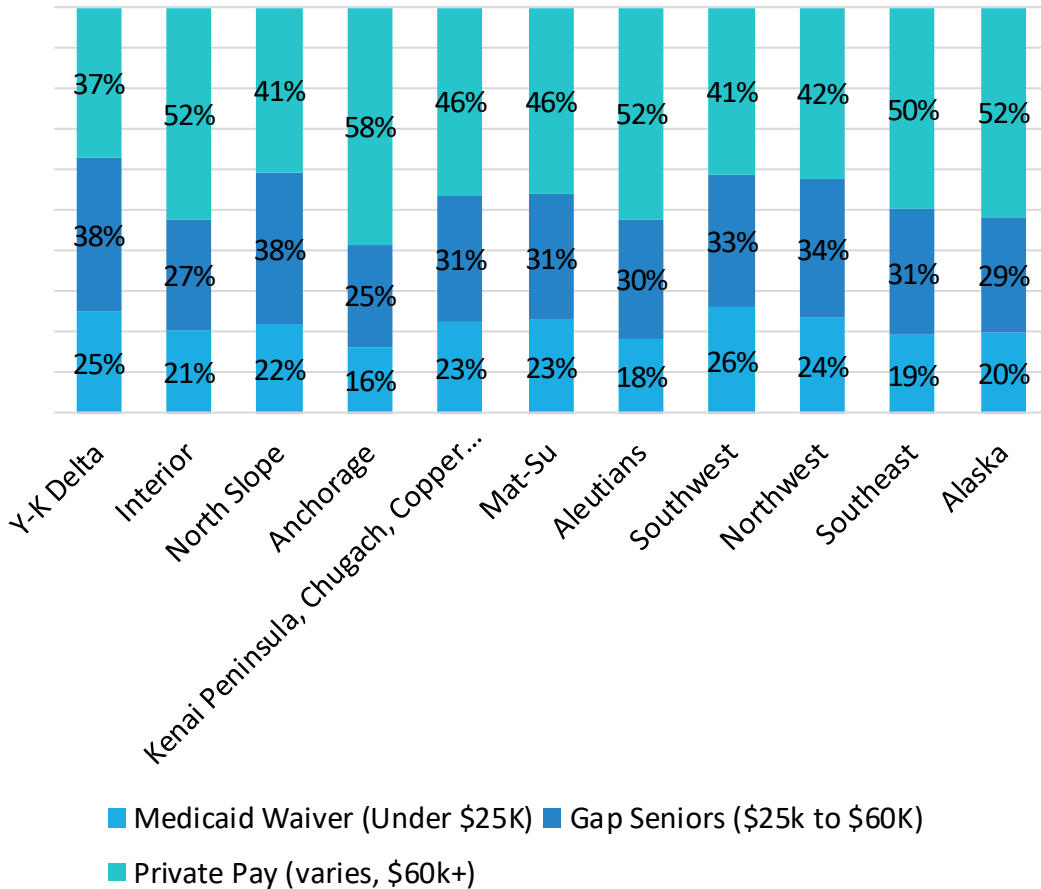
SOURCE: STATE OF ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR POPULATION PROJECTIONS 2018, PUBLISHED JUNE 2019.



Rate of Senior Population Increase by Region (2010-2022)

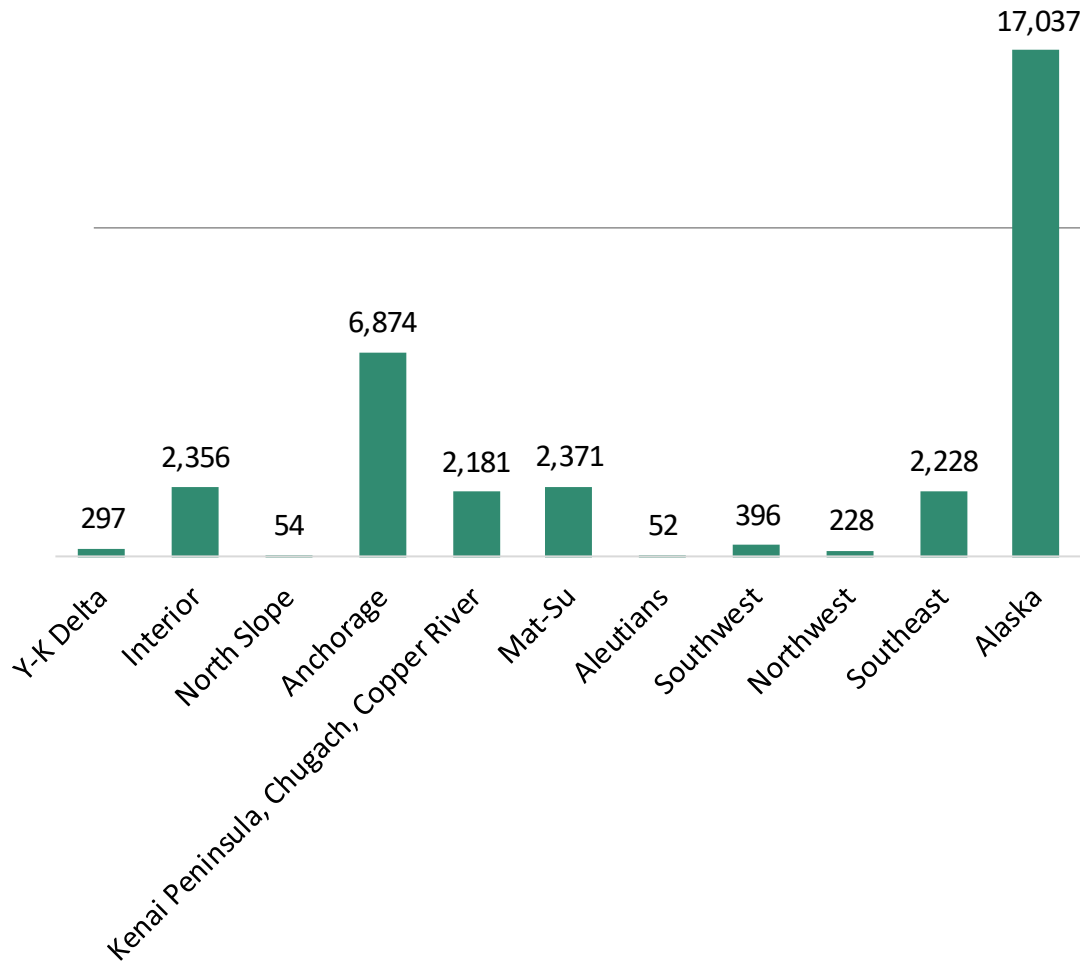
SOURCE: ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT POPULATION ESTIMATES, 2010-2022

Household Income- Householder 65 Years and Over



“Gap Seniors” and Ability to Pay for Assisted Living

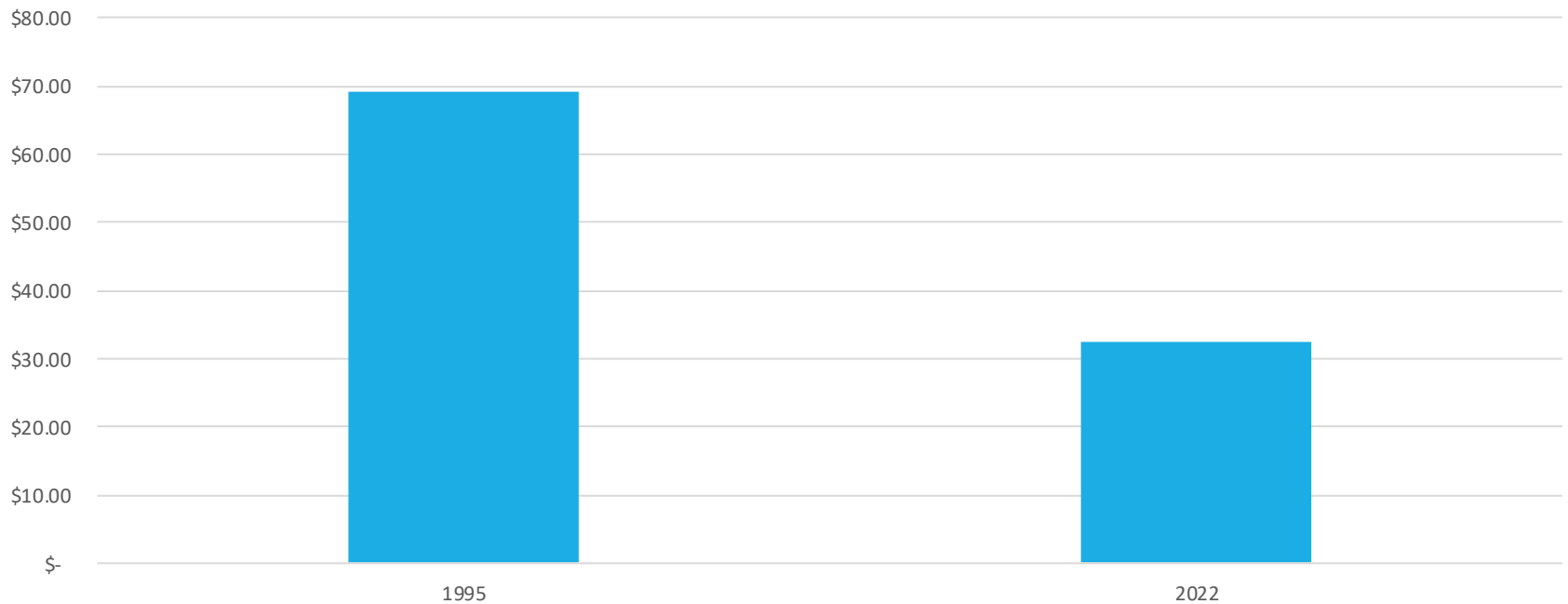
SOURCE: AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY 2021 5 YEAR ESTIMATES



Seniors 60+ Living in Poverty

SOURCE: 2021
AMERICAN
COMMUNITY SURVEY
5-YEAR ESTIMATES

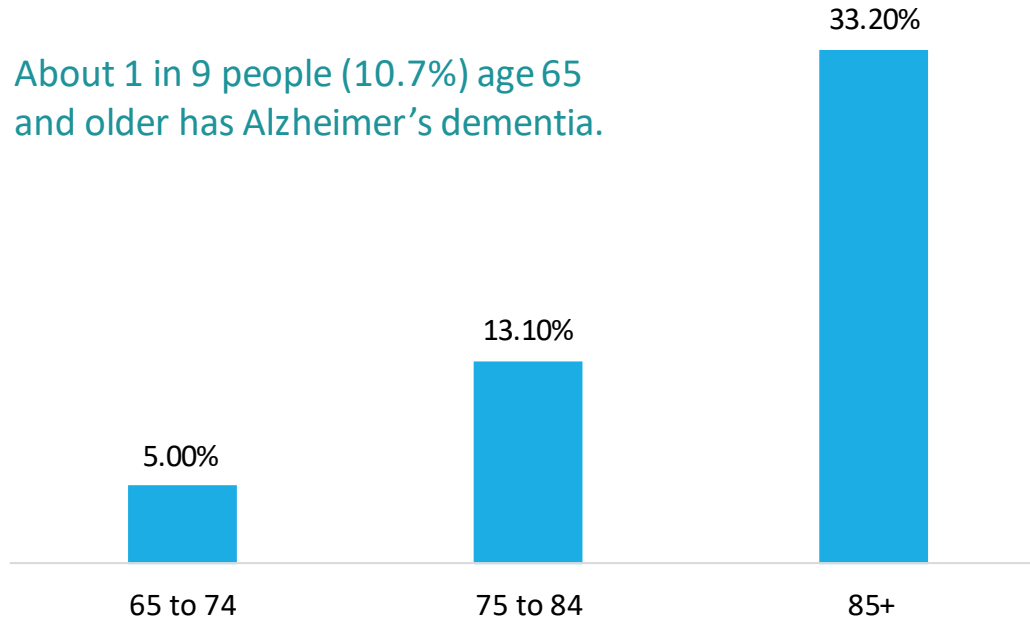
Inflation Adjusted NTS Funds Per Alaska Senior: 1995 vs 2022



Reduced Spending Per Senior

In light of past and future population growth, per-capita spending on seniors has declined substantially over time.

About 1 in 9 people (10.7%) age 65 and older has Alzheimer's dementia.



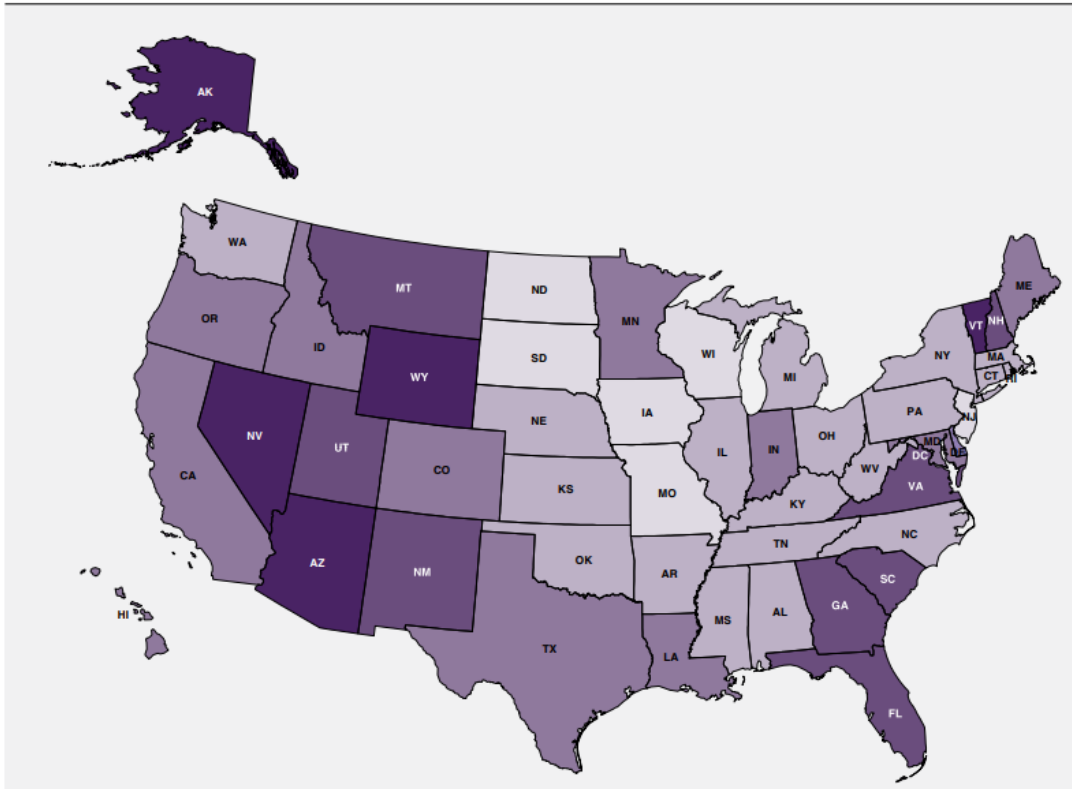
Source: Alzheimer's Association, 2022 Alzheimer's Statistics Facts and Figures Report. Projections.

Note: Estimates do not include the related dementia that is not considered Alzheimer's.

Rates of Alzheimer's
Disease Increases
with Age

Projected Increases Between 2020 and 2025 in Alzheimer's Dementia Prevalence by State

6.7% - 12% 12.1% - 17.3% 17.4% - 22.6% 22.7% - 27.9% 28.0% - 33.3%



Projected Increases Between 2020 and 2025 in Alzheimer's Dementia Prevalence by State

Source: Alzheimer's Association, 2022 Alzheimer's Statistics Facts and Figures Report. Projections.

Note: Estimates do not include the related dementia that is not considered Alzheimer's.

Commission Leadership

Robert W. Sivertsen, Chair



Bob brings a lifetime of dedication to his role as Chairman of the Alaska Commission on Aging. Of Aleut and Norwegian descent, Bob has spent all his seventy-three years in Alaska, contributing over fifty years of service to his community. His extensive career in Ketchikan included thirty-eight years working for the city, where he also served on the city council and as mayor for twelve years.

Bob's connection to senior care is deeply personal, beginning when his mother became a resident at the Ketchikan Pioneer Home. This experience led him to join the Pioneer Home Foundation, then the Pioneer Home Advisory Board, and eventually, the Alaska Commission on Aging, a commitment that has spanned over sixteen years. Throughout his tenure, Bob has faced the complex challenges of delivering fair services across Alaska's vast and diverse landscape. His involvement has extended to numerous boards, from local youth sports to significant roles such as Chair of the Ketchikan's Alaska Pioneer Home Foundation and the Southeast Alaska Power Agency.

With a large extended family in Southeast Alaska, Bob's roots in the community run deep. His work with seniors across Alaska reflects his understanding of their diverse needs and the unique challenges of service delivery in the state. Bob takes pride in his work, considering it an honor to serve the seniors of Alaska and contribute to their well-being.

Commission Leadership - Paula

Paula Pawlowski, Vice Chair

Born in Anchorage, Paula has an extensive background in educational advocacy through her work with the Alaska PTA and the Alaska State Board of Education, where she has been a staunch advocate for systemic parent involvement in education. Her adaptability was further demonstrated between 1989 and 1996 when she left Alaska to accompany her husband, Captain Bob, on military deployments. During these years, Paula's career was diverse: she worked in bookstores, art galleries, provided home daycare, contributed to workforce skills retraining, participated in mayoral campaigns, and was involved with PBS Children's Television.

Completing her working career as the leader of the State of Alaska AmeriCorps Program from 2013 to 2016, Paula's dedication to service extended into numerous volunteer activities. She has been involved with the Anchorage Museum, Community Schools, National PTA (both as a board member and a national trainer), Bridge Builders of Anchorage, the National Military Family Association, and the Armed Services YMCA Alaska. Notably, she also served as a Board Member and Chair of the Anchorage Senior Activities Center. Her appointment to the Alaska Commission on Aging in 2009 was a natural progression of her commitment to service, where she has since served twice as a public member, in the designated DCCED seat, and has held positions as Chair and recently as Vice Chair. Paula's diverse experiences and unwavering commitment to advocacy and community service have significantly contributed to her passionate advocacy for the well-being and empowerment of Alaska's senior population.



Commission Leadership – Capt Bob

Captain Bob, Pioneer Home Advisory Board Chair



Captain Bob Pawlowski, NOAA (Ret) is a retired NOAA Commissioned Officer, having spent 26+ years of service in support of NOAA's charting and fishery management programs, both ashore and at-sea. After completing his service, he earned Masters of Engineering Management and Business Administration from the University of Alaska Anchorage. Following his service Captain Bob managed a Native Village Corporation, led a Fishery Development Foundation, staffed to the Denali Commission and the Alaska Legislature, and led special projects at the Alaska Division of Oil and Gas. Each used his skills in planning and understanding federal and state rules, regulations and processes.

Captain Bob Pawlowski and his wife Paula call Anchorage home. They came to Alaska in 1984 as part of his service as a NOAA Commissioned Officer. This also meant that Paula returned to Anchorage, having been born here and being 4th generation to live in Alaska. In 1996, they and their family returned permanently to Alaska completing his work career and retiring in 2015. Since retiring, Bob has served on the Port of Alaska Port Commission, Chairs the Alaska Pioneer Homes Advisory Board, and volunteers for veteran and military interests with the Navy League, AARP, Military Officers Association of America, and Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing-Alaska.

Commission Leadership - Jan

Janet Engan, Public Member

Janet Engan has served the Alaska Commission on Aging since September 2020, bringing extensive experience from her accomplished career in senior care and social work. Residing in Wasilla with her family, Janet's Alaskan story began in 2007, reinforcing her commitment to the state's aging population.

Janet's early education in Minnesota laid the foundation for a lifelong dedication to community service, culminating in a Social Work degree she pursued while supporting her husband through health challenges. Her professional journey includes impactful roles such as directing volunteer programs in Minnesota, leading aging services in Arizona, and enhancing senior nutrition and care programs across North Dakota and Alaska.

Following her return to Alaska in 2015 to be nearer to her children and grandchildren, Janet has remained an active advocate for the elderly. Her work has not only included directing the Older Alaskans Program but also implementing critical state-wide services in North Dakota, such as the Aging and Disability Resource Center and Dementia Care Services.

In retirement, Janet's passion for senior care persists. She actively participates in the Mat-Su Borough Health and Social Services Committee and lends her expertise as a secretary for local organizations. When not engaged in community work, she cherishes time with her grandkids, great-grandkids, and her quilting.



Commission Leadership - Nona

Nona Safra, Public Member

Nona has made meaningful contributions in Alaska since her arrival in 2011. With a background in management and a passion for working with seniors, veterans, and individuals with disabilities, she has dedicated herself to addressing key issues in Alaska such as housing, employment, and healthcare.

Influenced by early interactions with notable figures like Helen Keller and Eleanor Roosevelt, Nona has been inspired to live a life of service. Her commitment is particularly strong towards improving the lives of veterans and their families, focusing on creating sustainable opportunities and combating issues like veteran suicide.

Nona's involvement in Alaska includes significant roles with the Alaska Commission on Aging and the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education. She has also contributed to various community services and projects, such as the Traumatic & Acquired Brain Injury Task Force and the VIPER – Veteran Transition Redefined program.

Educated at Temple University with additional specialized training, Nona has been recognized for her service with awards including the Alaska First Lady's Volunteer of the Year. Her work epitomizes the belief that collaborative efforts are key to community improvement and supporting Alaskan families.



Commission Leadership - Tony

Anthony Newman, Department of Health Designee

Tony has been an integral part of the Alaskan community since 1993, combining his roles as a father and husband with a deep commitment to public service. Since 2001, Tony has dedicated his career to the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, now known as the Department of Health, playing a crucial role in shaping policies and programs for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

In May 2020, Tony was appointed deputy director of the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, and in March 2023, he ascended to the position of Division Director. Prior to joining the Department, he honed his skills in Juneau's nonprofit sector, serving as an executive director and case manager. This experience laid a solid foundation for his current responsibilities.

Tony's educational background includes a bachelor's degree from Penn State University and a master's degree from the University of Alaska Southeast. In his role as Division Director, he is tasked with the vital responsibility of overseeing the administration of the Division's mission. This includes promoting health, well-being, and safety for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and vulnerable adults in Alaska. His work is centered on facilitating access to quality services and supports that foster independence, personal choice, and dignity.



Commission Leadership - Darlene

Darlene Supplee, Senior Service Provider



Darlene has been a vibrant part of the Alaskan tapestry for 24 years, having embraced the bold journey from Arizona to Fairbanks—a move her friends laud as both brave and adventurous. Darlene's lifelong passion for supporting seniors blossomed from her childhood experiences at an assisted living home, where she observed her mother's dedication as a head nurse.

In her esteemed role with the Alaska Commission on Aging, Darlene brings a depth of experience gained from 11 years as Executive Director of the Fairbanks Senior Center. Her commitment extends through her active roles in AGEnet, as co-chair of the Interior Community Health Improvement Plan committee, and as a member of the Fairbanks North Star Borough Senior Advisory Commission.

Darlene is a steadfast advocate for the collective care of Alaska's elders, often saying, "It takes a village to care for our aging Pioneers." She is proud to amplify the needs of seniors through her work with the Commission, ensuring they receive the community support and attention they need and deserve.

Commission Leadership - Pam

Pamela Samash, Public Member

a resident of Nenana, Alaska, brings a heartfelt dedication to her role in senior care, inspired by a lifetime of experiences and a deep family connection. Living in Alaska for 23 years, Pamela originally hails from North Pole, Alaska. She shares her life with her husband Ronald, to whom she has been married since 1995, and their four daughters, Nicolette, Grace, Angelica, and Serena.

Pamela's home is a lively hub, with a variety of pets, outdoor laying hens, and ducks, reflecting her love for animals and nature. This love extends to outdoor activities, with kayaking and fishing at Kasilof being among her family's favorite pastimes.

Her passion for senior care was kindled in her youth, growing up near a retirement community where she frequently brought her puppies and bunnies to visit the residents. The close relationships she cherished with her grandmothers further shaped her understanding and appreciation for seniors. Influenced by their zest for life, Pamela is committed to helping seniors live independently and fully, honoring their contributions and experiences.

Pamela's dedication to senior care is particularly profound for retired military personnel, stemming from her family's military background. Embracing the Marine Corps ethos of "no man shall be left behind," she believes this principle should extend to include our seniors, recognizing their sacrifices and ensuring they are not forgotten.



Commission Leadership - Lisa

**Lisa Von Bargaen, Department of Commerce,
Community & Economic Development**



Lisa Von Bargaen is the Deputy Director of the Alaska Broadband Office, a position she has held since February of 2022. Most recently, she was the Senior Project Manager in the Commissioner's Office of the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development for the State of Alaska where she had various roles, including serving as the Interim Staff for the Office of Broadband, responsible for establishing the office and responding to federal broadband funding opportunities. Ms. Von Bargaen has 25 years of experience in non-profit and municipal management. Between 2017 and 2021 she was the Borough Manager for the City & Borough of Wrangell. Prior that she was the Community & Economic Development Director for the City of Valdez for 16 years. Lisa is a lifelong Alaskan who currently splits her time between Valdez and Wrangell. Lisa has personal and significant understanding of the needs of aging Alaskans as she and her sister manage their mother's full-time care at home, and did the same for their father prior to his passing.

Commission Leadership - Kelda

Kelda Barstad, AMHTA Program Officer

Kelda's contribution to the Alaska Commission on Aging is invaluable. As a lifelong resident of Anchorage, Alaska, has built a distinguished career as a social worker and an advocate for systemic change. With a deep-rooted passion for the well-being of Alaskans, Kelda is dedicated to ensuring that individuals thrive in their community of choice. Her professional journey has spanned across state and local government as well as non-profit agencies, where she has served people of all ages. Kelda's educational foundation was laid with a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, followed by a Master of Science in Social Work from Columbia University.

Over the past 25 years, Kelda's work has encompassed a wide array of fields including prenatal care and early education, public benefits, immigration policy, child protective services, case management, adult protective services, rural service expansion, telehealth, and senior and disability services. Her expertise also extends to supportive housing and homeless services. Currently, Kelda serves as a Program Officer at the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, focusing on Housing and Home and Community-Based Services. Additionally, she fulfills an important role as an agency liaison for the Alaska Commission on Aging. Her involvement with the Commission and support for older Alaskans has been a significant part of her career for over a decade.



Commission Staff

Jon Haghayeghi – Executive Director

With an academic foundation in economics, holding a Bachelor's degree from Southern Methodist University and a Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate University, Jon's career has been centered on public service and economic research.

His professional journey with the State of Alaska began in 2019 at the Division of Finance before serving as the Executive Director of the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission. Driven by his parents' legacy in public service and his own findings on demographic challenges in Europe, Jon transitioned to the Alaska Commission on Aging.

At the Commission, Jon has been instrumental in developing the State Plan for Senior Services for 2024 to 2027 and steering the organization through a legislative audit. His commitment extends beyond the office as he travels statewide, connecting with communities to understand and advocate for the needs of Alaska's seniors. Jon is focused on highlighting the pressing needs of the aging population, ensuring proactive measures are in place for sustainable senior services.

Marty Lange – Program Coordinator II

Marty Lange grew up in Juneau, Alaska. He graduated from Biola University 1989 with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications with an emphasis on Radio and TV production.

He served with SIL, an international non-profit organization, for 31 years, first as an audio recordist and later as an audiovisual media consultant. He specialized in training indigenous groups to create Scripture-based media in their own languages. From 2014 to 2022 he led SIL's Americas Area Mobile Technology for Scripture Engagement team, training indigenous groups how to build apps in their language which were usually the first apps ever created in those languages.

He currently works for the Alaska Commission on Aging as a Program Coordinator. This allows him to combine his many years working in media with highlighting issues that affect Alaska's senior population. He especially enjoys the opportunity to work with elders and those providing services to elders in Alaska's rural and remote communities.