



2024

ANNUAL REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

JOURNEY TO A HEALTHIER **FUTURE**



Table of Contents:

Milestones Reached	4
Meet Our Leadership Team	6
Commissioner Letter	7
Child Care	8
Transformation of Care	10
Suicide and Overdose Prevention	12
Strengthening the Behavioral Health System	14
Division of Public Assistance	16
Division of Public Health	17
Division of Behavioral Health	18
Division of Health Care Services	19
Division of Senior and Disabilities Services	20
Division of Finance & Management Services	21
Modernization	22
Looking to the Future	24

Milestones Reached:

2023

AUGUST

2023

Bethel DPA office opened for same day service for clients

SEPTEMBER

2023

OCTOBER

2023

CMS approves 1915K waiver amendments

FEBRUARY

2024

Postpartum Medicaid coverage implemented from SB58

Complete migration of DOH website from SharePoint 2013 to SharePoint 2019

NOVEMBER

2023

Juneau and Kodiak DPA offices opened for same day service for clients

DPA - Document management system shifted to cloud

DECEMBER

2023

First Governor's Taskforce on Child Care report released



Online SNAP application launched

JANUARY

2024

Kenai and Homer DPA offices opened for same day service for clients

AIRES shifted to cloud

MARCH

2024

DPH receives accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board

Wasilla DPA office opened for same day service for clients



CMS approves extension to Alaska's 1115 Behavioral Health Reform demonstration waiver

APRIL

2024

Dr. Robert Lawrence announced as Chief Medical Officer

Statewide Opioid Settlement money opened for grant applications

MAY

2024

Alaska Native and Youth Focused 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Communications Plan released

Legislature passes HB344, HB202, HB 371, and HB126

JUNE

2024

Began collecting ideas for Medicaid coordinated care project

Strengthening the System II: Alaska's Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program Plan completed

Behavioral Health Roadmap Project for Youth report released

2024

Meet our Leadership Team



Heidi Hedberg
Commissioner



Emily Ricci
Deputy Commissioner



Dr. Robert Lawrence
Chief Medical Officer



Pam Halloran
Assistant Commissioner



Tony Newman
Director, Senior and Disabilities Services



Lynne Keilman-Cruz
Director, Health Care Services



Tracy Dompeling
Director, Behavioral Health



Lindsay Kato
Director, Public Health



Deb Ethridge
Director, Public Assistance



Heidi Hedberg
Commissioner

Department of Health Areas of Focus



As a newly established department, we prioritize building strong relationships with the people and communities we serve.

Community engagement is critical to this process.

By actively listening and responding to the needs of Alaskans, providers, and advocacy groups, we gain valuable insights about their unique challenges and successes. These conversations help shape our approach and strategies as we implement the Governor's Healthy Families Initiative.

From these discussions, we identified four areas of focus we refer to as, “arcs of effort”:

- Transformation of Care
- Child Care
- Overdose and Suicide Prevention
- Strengthening the Behavioral Health System

Our progress is the result of the unwavering dedication and collaboration of our staff, partners, and communities. While we have reached milestones, there is still much to do. We remain committed to promoting the health, well-being, and self-sufficiency of all Alaskans.

Child Care:

Child care is a pillar of a healthy, strong community that supports children and families.



Our Goals



Increase access and affordability to safe, high-quality child care



Build public/private partnerships



Improve system efficiencies

Child Care Program Office distributed over **\$24.5M** to licensed childcare providers, individuals, and communities.

Governor’s Task Force on Child Care

The Governor’s Task Force on Child Care in Alaska, established under [Administrative Order 346](#) addresses challenges related to child care accessibility, affordability, and quality statewide. An initial report from the Child Care Task Force was submitted to the Governor in December 2023, offering recommendations on background checks, licensing, workforce development, business partnerships, and Tribal authority. The task force completed their final report. The report outlined 56 recommendations informed by [multiple studies](#), public comment, and technical assistance from local, state, and national experts. These policy recommendations are aimed at creating a sustainable and inclusive child care system that strengthens families and the economy.

Key accomplishments:



A comprehensive study on [the true cost of childcare in Alaska](#) was conducted in 2023–2024 to inform policy decisions and funding needs.



To expedite background checks for childcare workers, the state invested in digital fingerprinting equipment. This advancement will accelerate the hiring process for child care facilities, addressing workforce shortages more efficiently.



The Alaska Child Care Information System (AKCCIS) is being developed. Once completed, the online portal will streamline and modernize the child care technology platform to better serve families, providers, and staff.



- The Department of Health has introduced regulations to tackle workforce challenges faced by Child Care Administrators by:
- o Expanding educational pathways to meet eligibility requirements
 - o Allowing administrators to delegate responsibilities to qualified staff during their absence
 - o Eliminating the Child Care Associate requirement, which had posed a major obstacle for child care businesses



Revised regulations to establish Tribal child care as exempt from state licensing requirements when federal oversight is provided.

These accomplishments reflect the department’s commitment to creating a sustainable and inclusive child care system that supports families, strengthens the workforce, and contributes to Alaska’s economic growth.



Transformation of Care

Medicaid innovations improve health outcomes and reduce health care costs.



Improve Access to Medicaid School-Based Services

Alaska’s school-based services (SBS) project aims to increase Medicaid reimbursement for health care services provided to Medicaid-enrolled students in the school setting. Approximately 10% of Alaska’s 54 school districts currently use Medicaid billing for eligible SBS, including speech, occupational and physical therapy, audiology, and nursing services. Right now, reimbursement is only available for students with disabilities whose Medicaid-eligible services are included in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). House Bill 344 passed during the last legislative session, eliminating these requirements. This allows the school-based Medicaid program to broaden reimbursement for all Medicaid-enrolled children receiving SBS, effective July 1, 2025.

In partnership with Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) and other stakeholders, these changes will let parents authorize in-school services, including behavioral health support. This means fewer missed classes for kids, fewer work absences for parents, and better access to care for Alaska’s youth.



Complex Care

The Complex Care Initiative, a collaboration between Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Family and Community Services, focuses on improving care for individuals with complex behavioral and medical needs. It aims to create a coordinated system that delivers compassionate, timely, and person-centered care across various settings.

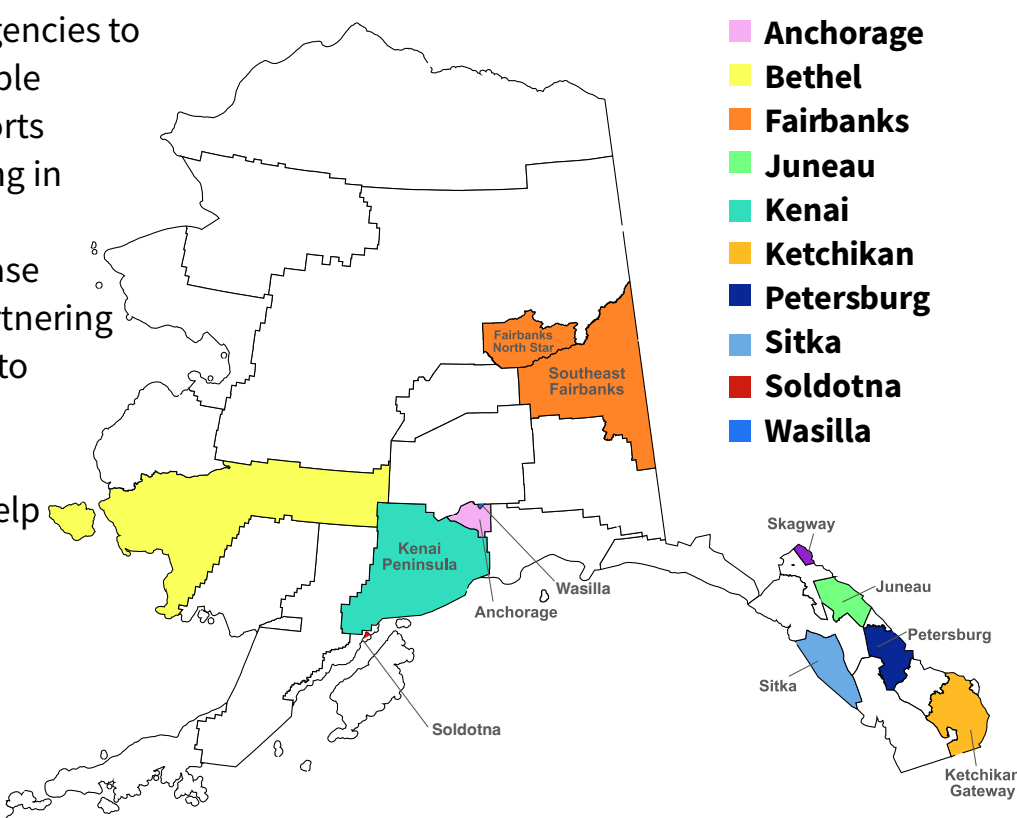
The initiative includes three working groups: the Case Response Team, the Complex Care Committee, and the Complex Care Advisory Group (CCAG). While the first two groups launched in FY23, the CCAG will be established in the future to unite state agencies and stakeholders in developing community-based solutions.

Homelessness, Health Intervention and Prevention

Homelessness in Alaska is a complex issue that no single organization can solve alone. The Homelessness, Health Intervention and Prevention Unit connects homelessness service providers with state resources to improve support and care.

Last year, the unit traveled across Alaska to build relationships with housing and service providers while assessing each community’s unique challenges. They gathered valuable feedback on service gaps and provider needs, shaping future efforts to improve services, including better access to substance use counseling and treatment.

The unit also works with state agencies to support the health needs of people experiencing homelessness. Efforts include facilitating syphilis testing in shelters, developing policies for testing and treatment with Disease Intervention Specialists, and partnering with Department of Corrections to connect individuals leaving incarceration with local support services. These collaborations help provide better care and stability for Alaskans in need.



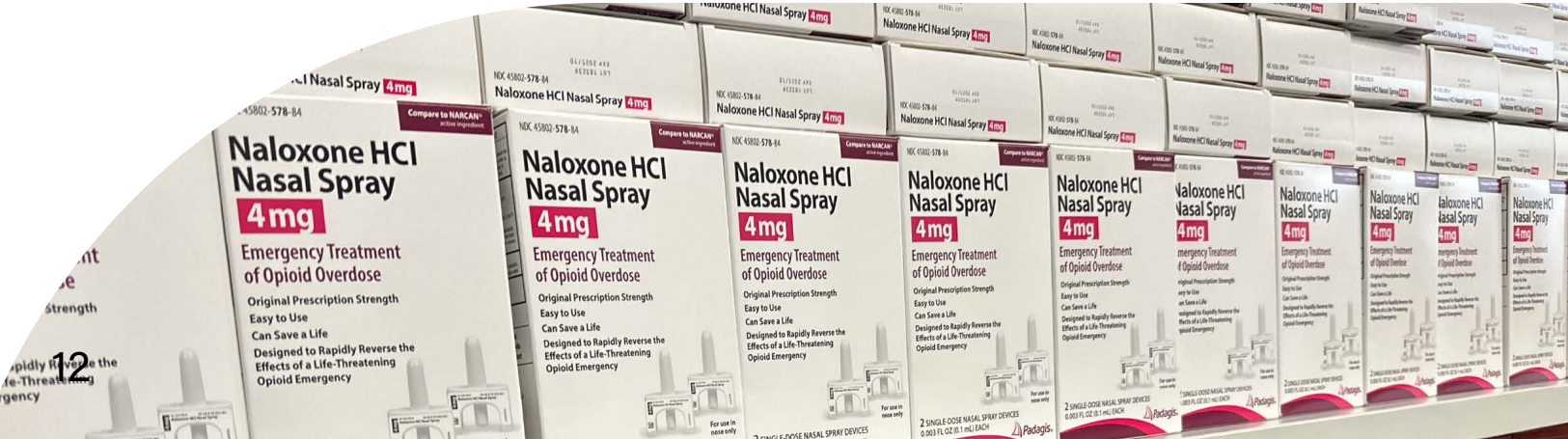
Overdose and Suicide Prevention



Our divisions and programs have worked separately to reduce Alaska’s opioid epidemic and high suicide rates for many years. This year, a new approach was taken, aimed to streamline efforts, improve coordination, and provide measurable outcomes. The Injury and Substance Use Prevention Section was created, merging programs into a more unified and effective unit, within the Division of Public Health.

Reverse an Overdose

During the 33rd Legislature, HB 202 was passed, requiring all schools to keep at least two doses of an opioid overdose medication on-site. As a result, DOH was tasked with supplying these lifesaving doses to over 500 schools across the state. Distribution is expected to be completed a month ahead of the legal deadline.



5 Cords of Intervention

With Governor Dunleavy’s support, DOH is partnering with Corrections, Education and Early Development, Public Safety, and Law through the Alaska Opioid Activities Framework. This all-of-government approach, working alongside communities, targets the crisis at every level through the Five Cords of Intervention: interdiction, prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery.



Overdose Fatality Review Commitee

With the passage of HB 371 in the last legislative session, DOH gained the ability to create a more flexible fatality review board. This allows for a deeper look into the causes of overdose deaths, a review of more cases, and a quicker response. Plans include developing region-specific strategies and working with Tribal Health Organizations to ensure these approaches meet community needs.



Partnership Highlight

Mobile Crisis Response teams in Mat-Su and Ketchikan are bringing solutions to the mental health needs in those communities. DOH is working to support local programs to improve mental health care in these areas.

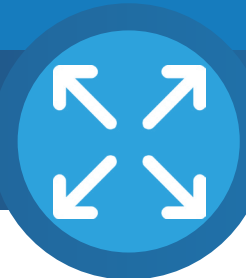
Strengthening the Behavioral Health System

Strengthening the behavioral health system is essential to ensure Alaskans have access to the right resource at the right time

Our Goals



Implement early intervention strategies



Expand crisis services



Increase access to youth behavioral health care



Increase services to support complex care needs



Support providers through streamlined payments and reduced administrative burdens

1115 Behavioral Health Reform Demonstration Waiver

The 1115 Behavioral Health Reform Waiver reflects DOH’s commitment to improving behavioral health care in Alaska. While progress has been made, including adding behavioral health providers to the SHARP program and expanding telehealth for Medicaid clients, more work remains. This waiver has already increased access to behavioral health services for over 13,000 Alaskans and was extended by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services through December 2028.

In FY24, the waiver supported an estimated:

15,100 unique recipients

5,800 people receiving SUD services

9,300 people accessing BH services

Behavioral Health Roadmap Project for Alaskan Youth

Alaska’s [Behavioral Health Roadmap Project for Alaska’s Youth](#) outlines a comprehensive plan to improve behavioral health services for youth across the state. It focuses on addressing gaps in care, aligning resources with service needs, and ensuring regional and cultural considerations are prioritized. The project involves collaboration with local providers, policy makers, and communities to develop actionable steps for a stronger, more accessible system of care.

Efforts continue to engage youth and rural communities, ensuring their voices shape improvements in Alaska’s behavioral health system.

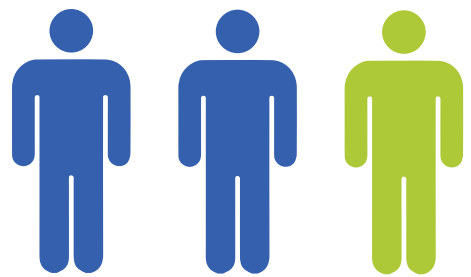


988 CREATE

The Youth Alliance for a Healthier Alaska hosted a 2024 art campaign themed “Healing and Support” to raise mental health awareness and promote the 988 crisis line for suicide prevention, featuring submissions from young people across the state.

Division of Public Assistance

Division of Public Assistance (DPA) connects Alaskans with essential resources to support their well-being and economic stability, ensuring fair and efficient access to public assistance programs, including food, medical, and childcare support. With offices across the state and partnerships in rural communities, DPA helps individuals and families navigate temporary hardships while promoting long-term self-sufficiency. By streamlining services, enhancing program integrity, and leveraging technology, the division remains committed to making assistance accessible and responsive to the needs of Alaskans.



Medicaid provides health coverage to

1 in 3 Alaskans

providing health care access to people with low-income, seniors, people with disabilities, and families.

Modernization

DPA is at the center of technology updates aimed at improving efficiency and access to services. In January 2024, the online SNAP application replaced a 28-page paper form with a smart form that guides users and ensures all required documents are included. This change reduces errors, cuts application time to about 20 minutes, and speeds up processing so Alaskans receive support faster. The first phase of [Alaska Connect](#) launched a new online client portal, allowing users to apply for assistance, renew benefits, report changes, and upload documents in one place, streamlining the process for both clients and staff.

DPA Office Openings

DPA offices closed in 2019 during the Public Health Emergency. When it was safe to reopen, staffing shortages made it difficult to open offices to same day service and process online applications. After completing a business process redesign, offices reopened, and community members could again meet with an Eligibility Technician to discuss their case, helping speed up the process. By FY24, all offices except Anchorage had reopened, with Anchorage expected to reopen in early FY25.

Division of Public Health

The Division of Public Health (DPH) helps keep Alaskans healthy by preventing disease, sharing reliable health information, and working with communities. Through education, support, and policies, DPH builds healthy communities for today and the future.

Accreditation

In March 2024, DPH earned their initial accreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board. This achievement highlights DPH's commitment to accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in serving Alaskan communities. Accreditation plays a vital role in providing the highest quality care and performance while strengthening the health department's infrastructure.

Syphilis campaign

In early 2024, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported a rise in congenital syphilis nationwide, which is the condition pregnant mothers who are positive for the disease pass on to their newborn. In 2022, 424 syphilis cases were reported in Alaska—a twenty-fold increase—and 12 cases of congenital syphilis in newborns. Since syphilis is easily treated when detected, DPH launched a statewide awareness campaign urging all sexually active adults to get tested within the year. While we expect to see an increase in the number of reported cases due to increased testing, each diagnosis is an opportunity for treatment and prevention.



DPH and Department of Corrections expanded syphilis testing in correctional facilities by shifting from opt-in to opt-out screening, ensuring more inmates are tested.

Oct 2022- Sept 2023, Tested 40 unique adults

Oct 2023 - Sept 2024, Tested 3,097 unique adults

Division of Public Health

Tuberculosis Sweeps

The Alaska Tuberculosis (TB) Program, in partnership with Public Health Nursing, provides targeted TB testing and screening in communities throughout Alaska. These visits not only offer community-wide testing but also allow teams to work with local leaders and health care providers to address TB. Strong partnerships with regional health corporations and local clinics help make these efforts successful, ensuring TB prevention and treatment reach the communities that need it most.

*17 villages visited, 1,408 Alaskans tested,
13% increase in number of TB tests at state lab*

Division of Behavioral Health

The Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) works to improve the quality of life for Alaskans by supporting the full continuum of behavioral health care, from prevention and early intervention to outpatient treatment, crisis care, and residential services.

Crisis Services

In June, 2024 the [Assessment of Alaska’s Behavioral Health Crisis Services Continuum of Care](#) was released. This assessment laid out a roadmap to strengthen crisis stabilization, an area we know is critical to the health and safety of people of in crisis. Next steps include engaging stakeholders and developing a plan that will drive lasting improvements.

*837,026 behavioral health Medicaid claims processed
totaling \$337M + in reimbursement to providers*

Division of Health Care Services

The Division of Health Care Services (HCS) ensures eligible Alaskans have access to quality Medicaid services while protecting vulnerable populations through certification and licensing. Committed to innovation and excellent care, the division focuses on efficient service, responsible resource use, and continuous improvement to enhance health outcomes and customer experience for all Alaskans.

Licensed 760 facilities statewide



*Increase of 468 beds statewide
4841 ↗ 5309*

Tracking Dashboards

Health Facilities Licensing and Certification created three tracking dashboards to allow our staff to monitor new provider licensing, provisional licenses, and survey schedules. These improvements reduced processing times for new applications and helped keep provisional licensing on track more efficiently.

Division of Senior and Disabilities Services

The Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS) helps seniors, people with disabilities, and vulnerable adults get the care and support they need to live safely and independently. The division works with communities and caregivers to provide fair, respectful, and person-centered services that foster independence, personal choice, and dignity.

25,000 *Alaskans benefited from grant services provided through SDS*

54,000 *Alaskans were served by Medicaid home and community based waiver*

InterRAI

In FY23, the legislative and executive branches funded DOH to modernize eligibility assessment instruments for individuals receiving support through Medicaid home and community-based waivers. These instruments, known as the “InterRAI suite of assessments”, will make it easier for DOH to pursue a number of systemic changes long sought by stakeholders. In FY24, DOH worked with the State Procurement Office to secure a contract for technical assistance, implementation support, training, and planning. In FY25, efforts have focused on securing federal matching funds for a software system to house InterRAI and in completing a licensing agreement for use of the tools. Implementation and planning will continue, with initial launch of one of the InterRAI tools planned by the end of FY26.

Division of Finance and Management Services

The Division of Finance and Management Services (FMS) ensures the effective and accountable use of resources to support health and social services for Alaskans. By overseeing audits, budgeting, grants, contracts, information systems, and financial operations, FMS safeguards public funds, streamlines procurement, maintains essential infrastructure, and maximizes federal funding. These efforts enhance transparency, efficiency, and accessibility, reinforcing the DOH’s commitment to serving communities across the state.

Recruitment

Hiring challenges aren’t unique to DOH, but our recruitment team has worked to streamline the process through improved procedures and communication. Previously, hiring delays impacted the entire department, but recruitment is now more structured, efficient, and proactive—expanding outreach, simplifying processes, and supporting divisions in attracting top talent.

By the end of the fiscal year, hiring time was reduced by over 30 days. The team continues to refine processes to ensure smooth, efficient hiring, allowing divisions to stay focused on their mission.



Modernization

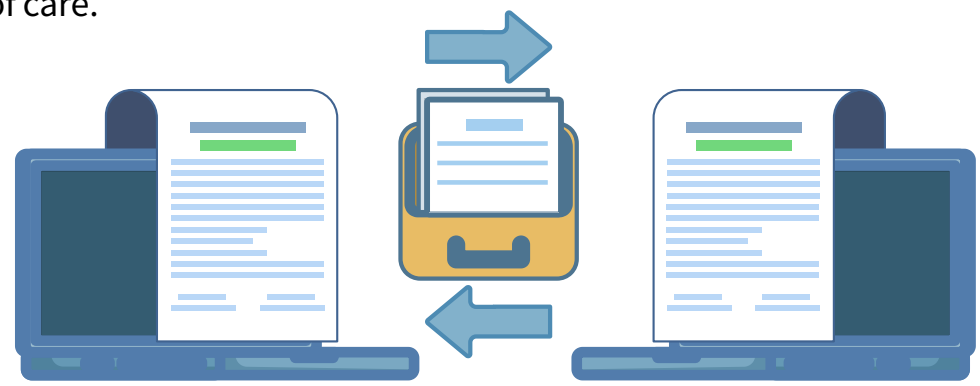
Department of Health Strategic Data Sharing and Integration

In FY24, DOH made significant strides in modernizing and improving data systems across its ecosystem. Key advancements focused on secure data exchange among diverse stakeholders in Alaska’s healthcare landscape. Two foundational systems—the Health Information Exchange (HIE) and the Interoperability Application Programming Interface—underwent major modernization efforts to enhance efficiency and security.

Alaska’s HIE connects healthcare facilities and providers statewide, enabling secure, near-real-time access to critical health data. By digitizing medical records, the HIE accelerates care delivery, reduces redundant tests, and minimizes administrative burdens, leading to better health outcomes and lower costs.

A record 140 organizations contributed to or received data from the HIE. Engagement also reached new highs, with more than 700 registered users and over 800,000 alerts sent to providers on behalf of their patients.

DOH launched a first-in-the-nation use case for the Trusted Exchange Framework and Common Agreement (TEFCA), a new secure data-sharing protocol. This initiative allows Alaska to access critical health records from HIEs nationwide, enabling authorized requestors to retrieve out-of-state medical records for patients being treated in Alaska. TEFCA participation will enhance care for visitors, transient workers, and seasonal employees. The HIE also advanced partnerships with community-based organizations to explore data sharing beyond traditional Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) relationships. Efforts are underway to facilitate bidirectional data exchange between healthcare providers and food banks, homeless services, social workers, and other community resources to improve coordination of care.



Modernizing the Interoperability Application Programming Interface (API) platform allows DOH to securely share data with authorized stakeholders. This investment enabled the reuse of critical data feeds, supporting new federal regulations and state data priorities. Projects using the platform require 75% less funding and reduce implementation timelines by 3–6 months compared to traditional methods.

Notable FY24 projects leveraging the platform include:

- Health Payment and Utilization Database (HPUD) – Data integration with the Division of Insurance
- Pulselight Critical Incident Reporting Project – Supporting the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services

Website Update

With funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), DOH is building a modern, user-friendly website designed for easy access on mobile devices. The new site will feature search and chat, language translation, and improved navigation to better serve Alaskans.

The updated website is expected to launch by mid-FY25.



Employee Newsletter

As the largest state department, DOH manages many projects that employees may not always be aware of. To improve communication and transparency, DOH launched “Healthy Horizons,” a monthly employee newsletter featuring department events, health awareness days, modernization updates, employee spotlights, division highlights, and a message from the Commissioner. This newsletter has helped employees better understand division efforts, leading to stronger collaboration as we work to improve the health, well-being, and self-sufficiency of all Alaskans.

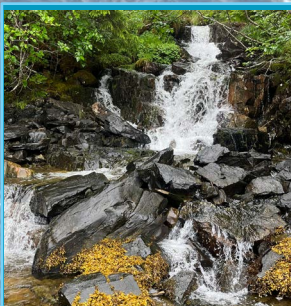


Looking to The Future:



NEW
Intranet
Hub

Narcan kits
distributed to
school districts
statewide



Final large
DPA
Office
opening for
in-person
service in
Anchorage

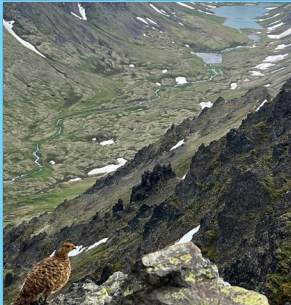
Updated
BRFSS Data
released



NEW
website
public



Medicaid
Rate
Methodology
Study



Partnership
with
Department
of
Corrections
to use the
state lab



Updated
YRBS Data
released



Implement the
Governor's
Taskforce
on Child
Care
Recommendations



Gen50C
paper form
going digital

School
Based
Services
launched



Complete
Medicaid
Renewal
Process



Medication
Addiction
Treatment
Guide
released

Launching
new child care
online portal

Reentry 1115 Demonstration Opportunity

DOH is exploring a Section 1115 Medicaid waiver to provide substance use treatment and chronic disease care for individuals up to 90 days before release from incarceration. This initiative aims to improve care transitions for people leaving incarceration and reentering the community. It would also provide Medicaid coverage and access to coordinated, evidence-based care before and after release, improving the overall health outcomes for justice-involved individuals. The next steps involve securing contractual support to evaluate system readiness and pinpoint key focus areas tailored to Alaska’s unique needs.

Justice-Involved Youth

DOH is implementing federal requirements to offer Medicaid services 30 days before release for eligible youth. Services will include screenings, case management, and care coordination to help with reentry. Efforts involve updating the Medicaid State Plan and working with juvenile justice and corrections agencies.



Watch our video about
Our Journey To A Healthier Future 2024



Governor Mike Dunleavy

State of Alaska

Commissioner Heidi Hedberg

Department of Health



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