February 10, 2021

To: Alaska Commission on Aging
From: Stephanie Wheeler,
Long Term Care Ombudsman
Sub: Report for Quarterly Meeting

Good News

- The LTCOP team will resume in-person visitations after almost a year of no in-person visits due to COVID 19
- Our Assistant and Deputy Ombudsmen have received their COVID 19 vaccinations
- Reentry Protocols are in place
- Office received extra funding during the pandemic - $100,000. The team will use these funds to purchase PPE and other supplies, increase travel, support team to do additional in-person visitations.

Office Transitions

- LTCOP will add a temporary Assistant Ombudsman to the team from March 2021 to October 2021 to help do in-person visitations across the state of Alaska.
- LTCO Specialist (Kerri Tanner) will move into the role of Assistant Ombudsman during this time.
- The LTCOP is currently advertising for a temporary LTCO Specialist to fill Kerri's position.

COVID 19 Response

- The LTCO Team will continue to work remotely through the end of the August 2021.
- In-person visits will begin in March 2021.
- Office will follow all safety protocols including screening for illness, checking temperatures before visitations, wearing PPE, social distancing, hand hygiene.
- The LTCOP continues to meet weekly with our collaborating long-term care stakeholders such as residential licensing, state survey agency (health facilities, licensing and certification), Mountain -Pacific Quality Health, Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association, and AARP.
- LTCOP team continues to participate in information sharing sessions with our state long term care agencies as well as our National Association of Ombudsman Program.
- Additional Staff and Volunteer Training included information on COVID 19, social isolation and resources for residents, mental health, Trauma Inform Awareness, Dementia, PPE, Communication Tools
- Provided resources via email, Facebook, twitter and website on COVID 19

How did COVID impact the work of the LTCOP

During the wake of COVID 19, the CDC issued recommendations preventing in-person visits to long-term care facilities. Since Ombudsmen were not considered essential workers, the LTCO were also prevented from doing in-person visitations, which consequently impacted our travel budget. While we ceased in-person visits in facilities in March 2020, our role was to continue to support residents within the context of the pandemic. The LTCOP changed the way that we ordinarily do business and moved to support residents and family members through virtual visitations. During this time of the pandemic, the

Ombudsman still responded to and investigated complaints brought to us by residents, their representatives and family members.

In addition to virtual visitations, the LTCOP created monthly town hall forums to provide information to residents. The monthly forums were also an opportunity for residents to share information with the LTCOP.

While we continued to support residents in long term care facilities, the statistics below shows how COVID-19 impacted our work. The statistics show a/an:

- Decrease in facility visits
- Decrease in open cases
- Decrease in closed cases
- Decrease in complaints received
- Increase in consultations to LTC facilities
- Increase in Information and consultation to Individuals.

The decreases in facility visits, open cases, closed cases, and complaints received can all be explained to the lack of in person visitations and lack of in person observations/verification of complaints.

The increases in consultations to facilities and individuals can be also be explained by not having in-person visitations. Residents and staff of facilities reached out more to the LTCO office.

Data by Comparison between 2019 and 2020

	2019	**2020**	
In-Person Facility Visits	1008	403	The LTCOP ceased doing in-person facility visits March 5, 2020.
Open Cases	367	282	
Closed Cases	388	261	
Complaints received	583	372	
Consults to Facilities	298	469	
Information and Consultation to Individuals	346	545	
Volunteer hours	905	436	In 2019, the LTCOP had 60 certified volunteers that provided 905 hours of volunteer time including in-person visits to residents across the state of Alaska. In 2020, the LTCOP had more volunteers (68), however these volunteers were not able to do in-person visitations. Many of our volunteers were also at risk due to the age of our volunteers.

As the effects of the pandemic are mitigated, the LTCOP looks forward to resuming in-person contacts with residents in long-term care facilities across the State of Alaska.

Volunteers

- Certified Volunteers have not been in facilities since March 2021
- LTCOP will be offering a refresher course to all volunteers before they begin visiting facilities in May.
- Begin recruiting new volunteers. Next volunteer training will be in the summer of 2021.
- Continue to have monthly Volunteer Meetings (virtually via Zoom)
- Challenge – retaining our volunteers, keeping them engaged and ensuring their health and safety as many of our volunteers are over the age of 60.

What's Next:

- Resume In-person visits to facilities
- Hire a temporary specialist for the Office
- Support our volunteers to return to in-person visits in May.
- Work with APS to coordinate efforts on educating volunteers, family councils, resident councils, family members and residents about abuse and neglect identification and prevention.
- Do some training around facility-initiated discharge and evictions to skilled nursing facilities.
- Continue town hall forums with residents in long term care facilities (move to quarterly instead of monthly).
- Engage more with resident and family councils in long-term care facilities.