AARP Priorities

Home & Community Based Services

Medicaid is the publicly funded health insurance program for low-income individuals, paid for through a combination of federal and state money. One Medicaid service option Alaska provides is "home and community-based services" (HCBS). **These services, along with supportive case management, assist elders in avoiding or delaying institutional care, and remaining as independent as possible in their homes and communities.**

Waivers support direct daily living services to elders including care coordination, help with activities of daily living such as showering and dressing, adult day services, respite, transportation, safety related home modifications, assistance with shopping and preparing meals, specialized medical equipment and nursing services.

Waivers also support the 84,000 unpaid family caregivers in **keeping elders at home instead of placing them in a costly long-term care facility.**

There are only 20 nursing homes in Alaska, which cannot accommodate our vast geography or growing senior population.

Almost half of Medicaid long-term care spending in Alaska goes to home and community based supports, one of the most cost-effective ways to deliver critical services to older adults by preventing costly institutional care.

- **Average annual Medicaid Waiver cost per senior: $35,826**
- **Average annual Medicaid nursing home cost per senior: $ 156,956**

Permanent Expansion of Telehealth Coverage

Medicaid Telehealth Coverage has been temporarily expanded during COVID-19 federal emergency declarations, including additional/increased provider categories, covered services, and delivery modalities. **These flexibilities should be maintained and built on to provide ongoing expanded access to care for Alaskans** including:

- Provider reimbursement parity with in-person visits
- Unrestricted patient and provider location
- Allowance of audio-only telehealth services
- Allowing providers to render telehealth services from their home without reporting their home address on claims
- Allowing telehealth for services such as physician visits in skilled nursing facilities; hospital initial, subsequent, observation, and discharge evaluations; emergency department and critical care services
- Expanded telehealth for behavioral health providers
- Expanded coverage to include telephone and online digital check-ins
- Allowance of telehealth for face-to-face encounters for case management services

AARP Priorities

Aging Safety Net

While most Alaskan elders are self-supporting and independent, some need financial assistance to remain living independently in their homes. Nearly 7% of Alaskan elders fall below the federal poverty line, which is where senior safety net programs come in.

Maintain Senior & Disability Services Grant Funding

State Division of Senior and Disabilities Services offers financial assistance to low-income Alaskans 60-plus who are ineligible for Medicaid waivers financial assistance to **provide meals, transportation, light housekeeping, chore, health promotion, adult day programs,** and more. Financial assistance is delivered through senior centers and other non-profits and funded through a combination of Federal Older Americans' Act dollars matched with state and local funds. **Average cost per senior: $484**

Maintain Public Assistance Programs for Low-income Elders

- **Senior Benefits Program** pays cash benefits to Alaskan seniors who are age 65 or older and have low to moderate income. Payment levels are tied to the Alaska Federal Poverty Guidelines. **Cash payments are $76, $175, or $250 each month depending on income.**
- **SNAP Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (formerly Food Stamp Program), provides food benefits to low-income households. Eligible applicants must pass income and assets tests. The gross monthly income test is based on 130% of the current Alaska poverty standard. **Average senior monthly payments: $250-350**
- **Adult Public Assistance** is a need-based supplement to Social Security, so recipients must be either certified as disabled by the Social Security Administration or be age 65 and older. **Average senior monthly payments: $236**
- **Low Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** is a federally funded program that provides heating assistance to households below 151% Federal Poverty Level.

AARP Priorities

Multistate Nursing Licensure Compact HB14, SB67

Single-state licensure model limits mobility of nurses, workforce stability, and access to care for patients. **Interstate health professional compacts play an important role in workforce stability and increasing patient access to quality healthcare** while reducing regulatory burdens that prevent health professionals from providing care in multiple states. AARP Alaska strongly supports participation in the Nurse Licensure Compact to help improve health care access for older Alaskans. Alaska should join the thirty-four states have already adopted the multistate compact.

- **Over 90% of Alaska nurses surveyed support joining the Compact** (*Survey of Alaska Licensed Nurses' View on the Nurse Licensure Compact, National Council of State Boards of Nursing Dec 2019*)
- There is a skilled nursing shortage nationwide which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Healthcare workforce shortages are even worse in Alaska.
- **Nurse is the #1 posted help-wanted position in Alaska**.
- Alaska has a long history of benefiting from traveling nurse programs to supplement our workforce. The compact could entice nurses to remain in Alaska permanently.
- **All nurses practicing under a multistate license must meet a minimum set of licensure requirements**, including a fingerprint federal criminal background check. These requirements are based on the highest regulatory standards for licensed health care professionals.

Exempting Long-Term Care Facilities from Immunity HB4

Residents of nursing homes and assisted living homes live in long-term care facilities, as they are unable to live independently and need assistance from staff. **They are some of the most vulnerable adults in Alaska and deserve to be protected.**

Under pandemic restrictions, in-person visits from family members and Long Term Care Ombudsmen has been restricted or severely limited. In-person visits from licensing officials has also been severely restricted. **This leaves these vulnerable adults without any independent oversite of care and safety during these difficult times**. Most residents of long term care facilities are unable to advocate for themselves and now they have limited access to people who can watch out for their health and safety. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused staffing shortages, infection control issues, and outbreaks in facilities. **Some residents of these long-term care facilities have died because of COVID-19.**

Due to their responsibility to provide care to Alaska's most vulnerable adult, long-term care facilities should be exempted from any COVID-19 business and professional immunity. Alaska should not strip away the rights and protections of residents. **Nursing homes and assisted living homes should to be held responsible for providing the level of quality care that is required of them, and for which they are being compensated.**