Alaska Commission on Aging - 2021 Legislative Priorities

Mission: 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.

(1) Support funding for senior grant services

Senior grant services are administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services and provide critical supports for older Alaskan's 60 and over throughout the state. These programs provide the framework for a variety of activities that improve the lives of seniors. Grant funds provide meals, transportation, home-maker, chore, health promotion, adult day programs, and a multitude of health and socialization opportunities that allow individuals to remain in their homes and connected to their communities. In addition to direct services to seniors, these grants fund Alaska's Aging and Disability Resource Centers that provide information, referral and assistance with accessing senior services by community.

Why are these services important?

• Low-cost home and community-based services support seniors to remain healthy and independent and help prevent an older person from needing more intensive and more costly care. Providing meals, transportation, assistance with errands, access to medicine, socialization, and other low-cost services provides the assistance seniors need to keep living independently. These services are delivered by senior centers and local non-profits and have been critical during the pandemic to reduce food insecurity, prevent social isolation, and provide healthy activities to home-bound seniors. Federal Older Americans' Act funds are matched with state and local funds is an investment in the health and safety of seniors statewide.

FY2020 Senior Grant funds (Federal and State): $14,468.274
Number of seniors served: 29,873
Average cost per senior: $484

Supporting Caregivers Makes Sense

• There are an estimated 12,500 Individuals who experience Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias (ADRD) living in our state today. Individuals with dementia often do not meet the physical level of need required to qualify for Medicaid Waiver services and rely on senior grant funded services such as adult day, respite, and other caregiver support to remain safe and give caregivers a break so they can continue to care for them at home. With support, caregivers are able to extend the amount of time they can care for their loved ones.

(2) Support Medicaid Optional Services Medicaid Waiver and Community First Choice Program.

Federally, Medicaid allows older adults 65 + who qualify for nursing home care, to receive "home and community-based services" in their own homes or an assisted living home. These services and supports are often referred to as "Medicaid Waivers," and are an alternative to Nursing Home care. These in-home services help with daily living tasks older Alaskans who experience dementia and other medical needs rely on to remain independent. Alaska has the fastest growing senior population in the nation, and without Home and Community based services, Alaska's nursing home costs would be monumental.

In FY2020, 2032 of Alaskan's received home and community-based services through the Medicaid Waiver at an average cost of $35,826. Alternatively, if Waiver services were unavailable, care would be provided in a nursing home at a cost of $156,956 per individual. Medicaid Waiver services save the state money and should be maintained.

Medicaid Waiver Cost per individual: $35,826

Nursing Home Cost per individual: $ 156,956

(3) Support capital funding for AHFC's Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund.

Senior Citizens Housing Development Fund (SCHDF) - Funding in the amount of $1.75 million GF remains intact in the budget. From 2001 to 2020, the SCHDF, when used with other AHFC financing tools, has resulted in an average of 66 new senior housing units constructed annually, with 96 new units added in FY2021 alone, for a total production of 1,616 new senior housing units statewide from FY2001 to FY2021. In addition, the Senior Citizens Housing Development Fund provided funding for the Senior Access Program of which 33 seniors (age 55+) utilized this program in FY2019. The Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund is an important grant program to address the need for safe, quality, and affordable housing for seniors statewide.

(4) Support Public Assistance Programs: Senior Benefits, SNAP, Heating Assistance

In FY2020 Alaska's senior population 60+ was 142,099. ***Less than 10% of the senior population receives one or more of these senior benefits*** which include cash assistance, food assistance, or heating assistance. It is critical to maintain programs to support these low-income seniors in rural and urban settings who do not have any other resources. Without these safety-net programs, seniors must often choose between housing, food, medications or heating their homes. The Alaska Commission on Aging supports maintaining the Senior Benefits, SNAP (food assistance), and Heating Assistance programs administered by the Division of Public Assistance.