

Alaska Commission on Aging FY06 Annual Report



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

We are pleased to present the activities and accomplishments of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) for fiscal year 2006. Our mission is to ensure the dignity and independence of all older Alaskans through planning, advocacy, education, and interagency cooperation. By statute, the Commission on Aging has a variety of responsibilities including the development of a comprehensive statewide plan for senior services, making recommendations to the Governor and Legislature regarding services to enhance the quality of life for older Alaskans, and collaborating with the Department of Health and Social Services, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, and other agencies on policy development.

During FY 06, the Alaska Commission on Aging participated in the 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCoA) that was held on October 23-26, 2005 in Washington, D.C. The White House Conference on Aging events are held every ten years for the purpose of presenting recommendations to the President and Congress on issues, policy, and research in the field of aging. The 2005 WHCoA had a legislative mandate to focus on the “aging of today and tomorrow” and included the 78 million baby boomers who began turning 60 in January 2006. In preparation for the event, the Commission compiled an official list of 28 recommendations that were delivered to the national conference by seven Alaskan delegates. These recommendations were obtained from community forums sponsored by ACoA and held across the state through the “Future of Aging in Alaska” series the previous year. Working in small groups, seniors, caregivers, providers and advocates discussed their concerns and made suggestions with respect to four main topics: Health and Long-Term Care, Financial Security, Community Resources and Social Well-Being and Employment.

In addition, ACoA contracted with the University of Alaska, Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) to complete an update to the 2000 McDowell report on the *Economic Well-Being of Alaska Seniors*. Whereas public policy often focuses on the potential cost of services for seniors, overlooked are the economic benefits of a retired senior population. Research indicated that retired Alaskans age 60 and older make an enormous financial contribution to the state, adding almost \$1.5 billion annually to the Alaska economy mostly from retirement income and healthcare spending. When seniors are considered as a separate economic entity, they become a financial asset for the state, not a burden. According to demographic projections provided by ISER, Alaska's older adult population is expected to more than double by 2030 when 17% of Alaskans will be age 60 and older, a demographic profile resembling the share of seniors Florida has today.

Finally, ACoA, working in partnership with other senior advocacy organizations and groups, celebrated a number of victories during the FY06 legislative session for passage of the following bills and resolutions: funding for flexible long-term care supports for individuals with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia; additional staffing for the Pioneer Homes, Adult Protective Service and the Quality Assurance program at the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services; and passage of legislation that established an Office of Elder Fraud and Assistance in the Office of Public Advocacy to investigate complaints of fraud committed against residents aged 55 and older. At the end of FY06, ACoA sponsored the Aging Advocacy Conference and launched the Alaska Aging Advocacy Network, a grassroots coalition effort to advance the issues and concerns of older Alaskans.

As we look to the future, there are a number of challenges and opportunities associated with the maturing of Alaska's population. While the rising cost of health care for an elderly population is an immediate challenge, there are a number of opportunities to invest in a healthy future for Alaska's older adult population. Developing programs and services that promote healthy lifestyles and enhance access to health care and services along the continuum of care are examples of fiscally responsible, evidence based practices that support older Alaskans' efforts to maintain autonomy and control over their lives.

We thank you for your interest in the Alaska Commission on Aging.

Sincerely,

Frank Appel
Chair of the Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,

Denise Daniello
Executive Director

**“In youth we learn.
In age we understand.”**

- Marie Ebner-Eschenbach, Writer

Who We Are

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is a state agency that plans services for older Alaskans and their caregivers; educates Alaska’s communities about senior issues and concerns; and advocates for needs of older Alaskans. The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) is the state’s federally designated “Unit on Aging”. The responsibilities that come with this designation are carried out by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (DSDS) with the Alaska Commission on Aging. The Commission is part of DHSS, administered under Boards and Commissions.

The Alaska Commission on Aging consists of eleven members, seven of whom are public members. They are gubernatorial appointees serving four-year terms. Three seats are filled by the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Social Services (DHSS), and Commerce, Community and Economic Development, or their designees and the Chair of the Pioneers’ Home Advisory Board. The remaining seat is reserved for a senior services provider, regardless of age. The Commission is supported by an office staff of four, including the Executive Director, two Planners, and an Administrative Assistant.

Alaska Commission on Aging Members ~ June 2006

Frank Appel, Chair
Public member, Anchorage

Sharon Howerton-Clark, Vice-Chair
Public member, Homer

Michael Black
Director of the Division of Community Advocacy,
Department of Commerce,
Community & Economic Development,
Anchorage

Patricia B. Branson
Provider member, Kodiak

Betty Keegan
Public member, Wrangell

Banarsi Lal
Public member, Fairbanks

Rod Moline
Director, Division of Senior &
Disabilities Services, Juneau

Iver Malutin
Public member, Kodiak

Edward W. Zastrow
Chair, Pioneers' Home,
Ketchikan

*Vacant: 2 public member seats
were vacant as of June 2006*

Staff ~ June 2006

*Linda Gohl, Executive Director

*Joanne Schmidt, Planner II

MaryAnn VandeCastle, Planner I

*Sherrie Stears, Administrative Assistant

* *no longer on ACoA staff in FY07*

What We Do

The Alaska Commission on Aging has several statutory directives. The Commission makes recommendations directly to the Governor, the Administration and the Legislature with respect to legislation, regulations, and appropriations for programs or services benefiting older Alaskans. ACoA has authority to develop a comprehensive State Plan for Services required for states receiving funds under the Older Americans Act. The Alaska Commission on Aging is one of four statutory advisory bodies, called Beneficiary Boards, to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. The Alaska Commission on Aging, along with the other three beneficiary boards, advises the Trust on issues and funding. Additionally, ACoA provides representatives to project workgroups of the Trust.

The Alaska Commission on Aging focuses its work in the following areas: planning, advocacy, education and public awareness, and interagency cooperation. The Commission includes seven standing committees that focus on specific topics. These committees are as follows:

- By-Laws
- Executive
- Gerontology Education and Training
- Legislative Advocacy
- Nominating
- Planning
- Older Workers' Recognition



Annual senior ice fishing day at Chena Lakes
co-sponsored by Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks and Recreation, Senior Programs
and the Department of Fish and Game
Courtesy of FNSB Parks and Recreation

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: The Commission has identified eight guiding principles that provide a philosophical frame of reference for all of the Commission's work.

QUALITY OF LIFE

1. Seniors will live with dignity and respect and have an opportunity to receive services to promote and enhance their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health.
2. Seniors will attain and maintain personal and financial independence at the highest level for as long as possible.
3. Seniors will be able to age in place, remaining safe in their own homes, chosen communities or regions of the state in the least restrictive setting possible.
4. Seniors will remain connected as valued members of their families and communities with opportunities for maximum mutual benefit and harmony between generations.

SERVICES

5. Services will provide satisfaction to seniors and caregivers, and demonstrate positive outcomes in the lives of seniors.
6. Services to seniors will be provided in as culturally relevant a manner as possible.
7. Services will be planned and provided in consideration, collaboration, and coordination with other groups and organizations in order to make maximum use of existing resources while ensuring that seniors receive the range of services they need.
8. Service providers will receive adequate training and professional development to ensure competent delivery of services to seniors.

FOCAL POINTS FOR PROGRAMMATIC WORK

1. Helping older Alaskans achieve economic well-being as they age.
2. Strengthening support to caregivers.
3. Striving to assure consistently high quality services.
4. Ensuring the availability of appropriate support services to older rural Alaskans.
5. Assisting grantees and communities to prevent elder abuse and promote the wellbeing of vulnerable Alaskans.
6. Promoting public awareness and action to achieve constructive public policy regarding issues that affect Alaskan seniors.
7. Working to improve health care and health care systems for older Alaskans.
8. Participating in workforce development projects for recruiting, training, and retention of direct service workers and health-care professionals.



Dorothy Levine hula dances at a luau at the Soldotna Senior Center
Courtesy of Southeast Senior Services

Accomplishments

During the Fiscal Year 2006 (FY06), the Alaska Commission on Aging was highly productive in the areas of planning, advocacy, education and interagency cooperation.

1. Planning:

- Engaged the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) in a contract to complete an update to the 2000 report on the *Economic Well-Being of Alaska's Seniors*.

- Collaborated in development of a mental health plan under the Department of Health and Social Services in conjunction with other boards and commissions. “*Moving Forward* Comprehensive, Integrated Mental Health Plan: 2006-2011” was published on the Office of the Commissioner’s website: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/commissioner/Healthplanning/movingforward/default.htm>
- Compiled suggestions from five community forums in four cities (Juneau, Anchorage, Wasilla and Fairbanks) held in FY05 for presentation at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA).
- Analyzed results of a senior survey conducted in April 2005 and published the findings on ACoA’s website: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/SeniorSurvey.pps>
- Established a State Plan Advisory Committee and began initial work on State Plan for Senior Services due at the end of FY07
- The Commission works with other organizations for purposes of planning services that include the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the Denali Commission, Rasmuson Foundation, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, the Division of Public Health, the Alaska Department of Labor, the Department of Transportation, and the Division of Behavioral Health.
- Participated with the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education in planning for the state-wide Aging and Disabilities Policy Forum.



Alma Penrose plants a container garden

Courtesy of Southeast Senior Services

2. Advocacy:

- Sent two Commissioners (Ed Zastrow and Pat Branson) as Alaskan representatives to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging (WHCOA). The six members of the Alaskan delegation presented 28 recommendations at the WHCOA. These recommendations were based on suggestions offered during the community forums

- Hosted eleven senior legislative teleconferences during the 2006 legislative session
- Coordinates efforts with statewide senior advocacy organizations such as the Senior Advocacy Coalition, AgeNet, and AARP
- Launched the Alaska Advocacy Network in June 2006 with 90 members
- Collaborated with other organizations in obtaining legislative victories for the following bills and resolutions during the FY06 legislative session through meetings with legislators and their staff, support letters, testimony, drafting position papers and other advocacy efforts:
 - Added 14 Certified Nursing Aid staff at the Pioneers' Homes
 - Added two Adult Protective Services workers in DSDS
 - Added two Quality Assurance workers in DSDS
 - Passage of Adult Dental Medicaid Enhancement (HB 105/SB 79) which provides Medicaid benefit for adult dental services
 - Maintained \$250.0 towards flexible long-term care supports for individuals with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) with \$125.0 from General Fund/Mental Health (GF/MH) and \$125.0 from Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA). The funds were included in the DSDS budget to maintain a program formerly funded by an AMHTA grant
 - Passage of Elder Fraud & Assistance/OPA (SCS CSHB 399), which established an office of elder fraud and assistance in the Office of Public Advocacy (OPA) to investigate complaints of fraud committed against residents age 55 and older and bring civil enforcement actions for injunctive and other relief.



Nancy Jackson keeps tradition alive through dance
Courtesy of Southeast Senior Services

3. Education and Public Awareness:

- Welcomed 185 attendees to the Aging Advocacy Conference in June 2006 featuring speakers on advocacy, the long-term care system, and factors influencing overall population health
- Conducted a media campaign encouraging the public to honor the knowledge and skills of older Alaskans during Older Americans Month, May 2006

- Participated in AMHTA's "You KNOW me..." public awareness campaign
- Published bi-monthly newsletter boasting a subscriber base of 700
- Hosted eleven public senior legislative teleconferences during the 2006 legislative session
- Welcomed Pat Branson to the Commission in August 2005 to the Senior Provider seat. (A legislative bill was passed in FY05 designating one seat on the Commission to be filled by a senior provider)
- Held Quarterly Commission Meetings in the following locations:
 - September 2005 – Soldotna. Commissioners visited numerous provider agencies on the Kenai Peninsula as part of ACoA's rural outreach efforts during this meeting.
 - December 2005 – Anchorage
 - March 2006 – Juneau
 - June 2006 – Anchorage



Henrietta Haberman and Ada Ward share a laugh

Courtesy of Southeast Senior Services

4. Interagency and Non-Government Cooperation:

- Participated with other boards and councils in the AMHTA “You KNOW me...” public awareness campaign
- Developed and presented information to the Administration and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority on behavioral health issues affecting seniors
- Participated with the Department of Health and Social Services management workgroup to assist the Public Consulting Group in the development of the “Alaska Long-Term Care and Cost Study” (February 2006).

- Commissioner Banarsi Lal Serves on the Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education
- Chairman Frank Appel represents the Commission on the Pioneer's Home Advisory Board
- Commissioner Ed Zastrow serves as the Chair of the Pioneer's Home Advisory Board
- Executive Director serves on the Alaska Brain Injury Network, a nonprofit organization promoting education, prevention, and advocacy for a service system to meet the needs of traumatic brain injury survivors and their caregivers.
- The Commission has designated commissioners and staff to serve as representatives on the following AMHTA committees and focus areas:
 - Housing Focus Area
 - Rural Committee
 - Trustee Applicant Review Committee
 - Trust Beneficiaries Group Initiative
 - Workforce Development Committee



Frank Rhines pulls one in during the Annual Senior Ice Fishing Day
Courtesy of FNSB Parks and Recreation

On The Horizon

The Alaska Commission on Aging is looking to the future and identifying both upcoming challenges and opportunities to support the work set forth for us in our mission statement.

Challenges:

Alaska and Alaskan seniors are facing a range of challenges in both the short- and long-range future. Demographics, funding for programs and services, housing, healthcare, and other concerns all contribute to these challenges.

- With mounting pressure on federal and state dollars from all directions, there is an emerging emphasis on fiscal responsibility and doing more with less. Prevention strategies, like supportive services and education, are some of the best tools Alaska can use to be fiscally responsible. The current national trend emphasizes programs, services and education that underscore prevention such as home- and community-based services. As home- and community-based services are more affordable than nursing homes, they are an increasingly important component of the continuum of care. Home- and community-based services are a sustainable piece of long term care planning by the state. By investing in the provision of home- and community-based services now reduces the need for much more costly services over the long-term.
- Alaska's Native elders want to age in their communities of choice. By offering prevention, education and supportive services in rural communities, seniors and Native elders in rural Alaska are able to remain longer in their communities, thereby enabling them to access established social networks, traditional foods, and other cultural ways of living. The lack of regional hub services presents several problems. Elders are seriously impacted when they are forced to leave their communities for services and care. Seniors and Native elders from rural and remote communities end up pre-institutionalized in regional or urban hubs, negatively impacting their emotional and physical health. This situation results in a social and cultural disconnect for the elder, their families and their home community. The community loses out on the participation and all that elders offer following generations when elders are removed to other locations to access services. Promoting healthy lifestyles and offering supportive services and education to rural Alaskans enhances the quality of life for everyone. Urban hubs are also greatly

impacted by this influx of rural and remote elders. Obligating seniors and Native elders from around the state to seek care and services in an urban hub such as Anchorage strains programs and systems designed to accommodate local populations. The regional or urban hub also bears an undue fiscal burden for providing services to older Alaskans from rural and remote communities.



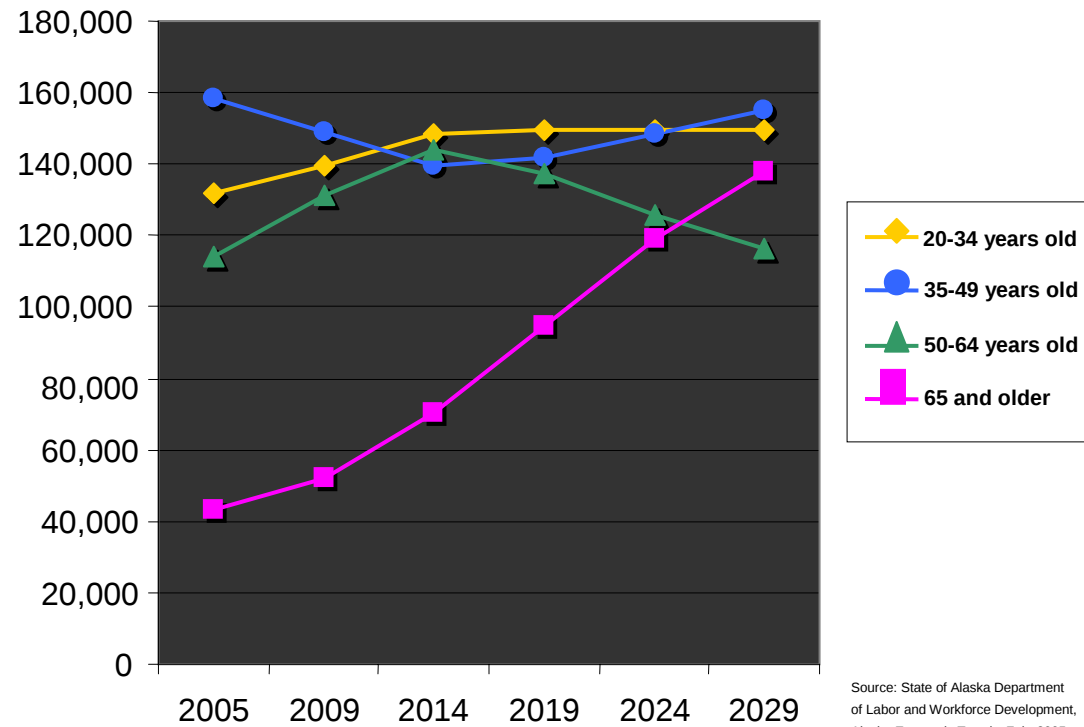
Merle Ritter goes to the polls to vote
Alaska Commission on Aging Collection

- Access to appropriate health-care is becoming a larger issue in our state. In some regions, there is real concern about physicians' refusal to accept or continue care for Medicare patients, which is an issue unique to Alaska due

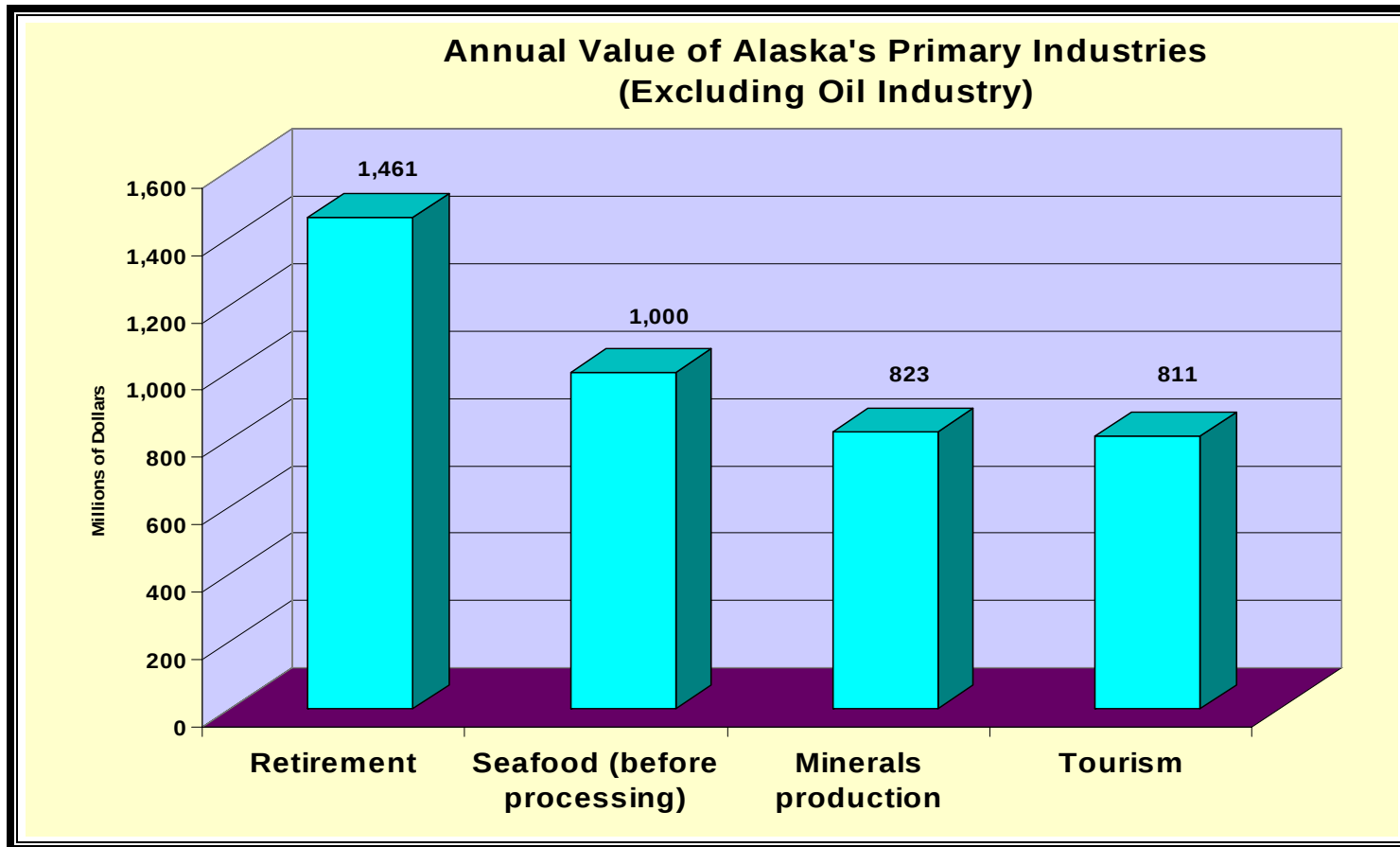
to the higher cost of doing business and the state's demographic profile. Alaska seniors suffering with Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias (ADRD) are ineligible for the Medicaid Waiver program unless they have a different, primary diagnosis. This oversight leaves low-income older Alaskans who are otherwise healthy unable to access appropriate care to manage their ADRD. Oftentimes, neglecting health-care leads to additional health problems, thereby costing the state more money to manage compounding health issues. By addressing health needs of seniors at early stages, including behavioral health needs, before even the first signs of failing health, Alaska will be able to assist older adults to stay healthy and spend fewer dollars on health-care down the road. Promoting healthy lifestyles, physical and mental, enhances quality of life for all Alaskans. Again, a prevention strategy is a more holistic, long-term, economically sustainable approach for managing this growing health-care challenge.

- Housing options for seniors in Alaska are also of concern. Alaska has a statewide shortage of accessible, affordable housing options. In some regions of the state, there are issues of inadequate availability of housing types, such as assisted living homes. In other regions, especially urban centers, affordability is a larger obstacle. The low and moderate income levels of many seniors limit their access to mortgage loans or make rent payments unaffordable. There is also a high cost related to accessibility modifications to homes that seniors may already own. The growing older Alaskan population will compound this problem as it puts more pressure on the senior housing market.
- Alaska's senior population is on the rise. We rank second out of all 50 states in the rate of increasing number of seniors. By the year 2025, 17% of Alaska's population will be seniors. So while our actual population numbers may be small in comparison to the rest of the country, the impact of this growing segment of our population is felt statewide. In many ways, the increasing number of older adults is very positive for Alaska. Seniors bring with them a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and provide a significant economic contribution to our economy. However, the increasing number of seniors results in increased demand for services, health-care, housing, employment, and other programs. Alaska needs to enter into a long-term care planning process to accommodate this swelling segment of the population in order to avoid having its systems stretched beyond repair.

Alaska Population Projections 2005-2029



Source: State of Alaska Department
of Labor and Workforce Development,
Alaska Economic Trends, Feb. 2005



Source: ISER 2006

Opportunities:

- An increasing emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention gives us the opportunity to redefine and expand our definition of “health”. As a state, we need to recognize the full spectrum of health includes all aspects of mental, emotional, and physical health. Being socially involved and civically engaged strongly support the individual's efforts to stay healthy. Community involvement provides the connections necessary for many individuals to access information, maintain relationships, and foster personal growth.
- The aging of the Baby Boomer generation, which has now begun to enter its senior years (the first Boomers turned 60 in 2006), is expected to bring new energy, intensity, and models of support into the arena of senior advocacy and services. While the population surge this group creates will be a challenge to the long-term care infrastructure, it's also likely to demand a higher profile for the concerns of seniors as well as more innovative approaches to seniors' needs.
- Alaska's seniors have a resounding economic impact on the state. Collectively, seniors bring \$1.5 billion of revenue into the state each year through retirement and other income, as well as medical payments. Additionally, seniors play a huge role in supplying knowledge to following generations through mentoring, teaching, and professional expertise. Alaska's seniors actively volunteer in the communities in large numbers and many continue to work in their respective professions. Seniors also constitute a large segment of our care-giving network for other seniors, the disabled and family members, including grandchildren.
- Promoting interagency collaboration between State programs and with the Legislature in the planning for future health care, behavioral health care services, transportation, in-home services and other programs that benefit Older Alaskans. The Commission looks forward to working with Governor Palin and the Legislature in the coming year.