

How Does Medicaid help Alaskans?



“Without Medicaid, we would be struggling - wondering how we would pay off everything.”

Eva's Story

Mountain Village, Alaska

Eva loves receiving texts from her daughters when she travels. She considers Mountain Village her home, but over the past six months, she has had to travel to Anchorage with her son for medical care. Although her son had been healthy, after his sixth birthday last June, he cut his leg playing outside. The cut turned into a knee infection, where he has now gone through eight surgeries. Over a month ago, Eva was let go at her job at the local gas station due to her medical travel with her son. With her husband working only seasonally as a firefighter in the summer, Denali KidCare has provided the financial stability for Eva to care for her son while he undergoes treatments for his leg.

Angel's Story

Bethel, Alaska

Angel understands the importance of Medicaid through her job as a behavioral health case manager. For villages across the Yukon–Kuskokwim Delta, she coordinates medical travel to Bethel, Anchorage, and sometimes Seattle – requiring airplane trips that are commonly covered by Medicaid. But, Angel understands Medicaid best because she is a beneficiary herself. During her first pregnancy, she was diagnosed with cholestasis, a medical condition that stops bile flow in the liver. Thankfully, Medicaid covered prescriptions and treatments to monitor her high-risk pregnancy. Medicaid also helps her husband, a construction worker who stopped working in January due to poor blood circulation in his hips. Her husband is currently going through screenings and will be going through hip surgery in the coming months – but as a mom with two healthy children, she can continue working without worrying about medical bankruptcy.

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"Medicaid is why I can go to college."

Celeste's Story Juneau, Alaska

Celeste wants to be the first in her family to graduate from college and become a nurse. Because of her personal experiences with mental health in the family, she aspires to work in the medical field. However, her plans were disrupted at the age of 15. During an annual physical, a physician found a singular pea-sized lump on her neck, which was diagnosed as a benign tumor on her lymph node. For six months, Celeste attended weekly hospital visits before undergoing cancer surgery in Anchorage. Without Medicaid, Celeste's family would have been in medical debt: her father's work in construction did not provide health benefits, nor did he have enough savings to pay for her cancer screenings. However, Denali KidCare was there to provide financial security during a time of crisis.

After her cancer scare, Celeste graduated from Susitna Valley High School, won multiple scholarships, and currently attends the University of Alaska Southeast. Recently, she tore two ligaments in her leg, but again, Medicaid covers her unforeseen health problems. With her leg in a brace, she continues to study for her associates in health sciences, work on-call in the dorms, and volunteer on campus.

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"I don't have to worry about getting a stroke on the job. I know that I'm extending my life."

Fannie's Story **Bethel, Alaska**

Growing up, Fannie learned about her own health through her family background. Both of her grandparents had multiple strokes in their late 80s. Although Fannie was born and raised in Bethel, she lived in Oregon after graduating university in Portland. Two years ago, she wanted a change of pace and decided to come home to Alaska, but her move was stressful; in her words, "I didn't expect to have all these health problems when I moved here." Within her first week of coming to Anchorage, her doctor diagnosed her with high blood pressure, requiring multiple prescriptions to manage her cardiac levels. Once she moved to Bethel, she was unemployed, but Medicaid helped Fannie gain access to prescriptions to manage her blood pressure, mitigate stress, and find a job. She now works full-time at a non-profit in her hometown. Since her job does not provide health insurance, Medicaid helps her to this day, accessing the preventive care she needs to decrease the risk of emergencies later in life.

Jim's Story **Soldotna, Alaska**

At 61 years old, Jim* is nearing retirement, but still works multiple jobs. On a daily basis, he moves heavy equipment for truck loads, and inventory at a furniture store. However, Jim wasn't always at the best of health: four years ago, his high cholesterol and unhealthy lifestyle led to a stroke - paralyzing the right side of his body. The medication and hospital treatment would have cost him thousands of dollars - unthinkable for his income. Thankfully, Jim had Medicaid. His stroke caused him to change his habits: he now works out on a regular basis, has maintained his cholesterol, and says that lifting heavy boxes day-to-day "doesn't bother [him]".

*Name has been changed to protect privacy.



“Medicaid helps families in rural Alaska access basic human needs.”

Joan's Story

Juneau, Alaska

Joan works intimately with Medicaid patients in Bethel, where she has lived for 23 years. As a social worker, she provides therapy and care coordination for many rural Alaskan families who are Medicaid beneficiaries. Over two-thirds of her patients are located in remote villages covering a region the size of the state of Oregon. Air travel is critical for services, costing \$600 just to fly into Bethel. Frequently, she works with clients who struggle with hunger on a regular basis.

For Joan, managing their traumatic health issues is critical to prevent their diagnoses from manifesting into serious physical, psychiatric, and emotional symptoms. With Medicaid covering air travel for many rural Alaskans, families in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta can access their basic human needs.

Frank's Story

Soldotna, Alaska

Frank* had worked all his life - 29 years as a journeyman carpenter, and 8 years working on an exploration Gold Mine. He had been earning over six figures while supporting his family of eight children. His life changed five years ago, when he was working on a drill rig - an accident with a helicopter caused the rig to suddenly shift, and Frank's leg suddenly contorted. He ripped his ACL and tore his MCL, rendering him unable to work. After 8 months of physical therapy, he lost his job, and enrolled in Medicaid - continuing his care and helping him walk again. As he searches for a job and cares for his children, Medicaid was able to give him the health care he needed in a time of crisis.