



Senior BENEFITS PROGRAM

Information & Fact Sheet
Updated August 25, 2017

Overview

The Alaska Senior Benefits Payment Program pays monthly cash benefits to Alaskans who are age 65 or older and have low to moderate income. Payment levels depend on available state funding and how many people apply and qualify for the program. If the state budget cannot support the original amounts of \$125, \$175 and \$250, regulations allow for changes to be made for all eligible program participants. Cuts come from the highest income tier first, then the second, then the third.

The monthly payment for the highest income level was reduced to \$47 from \$125 on March 1, 2016 due to the state's limited budget for state fiscal year 2016.* The budget for state fiscal year 2017 (July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017) allowed full monthly payments of \$175 and \$250 to recipients with the lowest income. Those income payment levels continued through the end of that fiscal year. Funding reductions in this program must be applied to individuals in the highest income bracket. They received \$47 for July because the budget was not finalized in time to make changes for July benefits. Beginning August 1, 2016, individuals in that highest income bracket received \$76 per month based on available funding at that income bracket. These income payment levels continued for state fiscal year 2018 (July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018).

** Due to a technical difficulty changing the benefit amount for the highest income tier, some seniors who were due to receive \$47 per month in April received \$125. To compensate, those that received the incorrect amount received \$8 per month in May and June.*

Eligibility and Payment

- Eligibility and payment amount is based on gross annual income (before any deductions are taken for taxes, Medicare premiums, etc.).
- Assets, such as savings, are not counted.
- Income limits may change yearly along with Alaska's federal poverty level. The \$250, \$175, and \$76 monthly payments correspond to 75 percent, 100 percent, and 175 percent of the federal poverty level for Alaska, respectively.
- Payments are not available to seniors living in the following institutions:
 - ✓ Prison or jail
 - ✓ A nursing home
 - ✓ Alaska Pioneers' Home or Alaska Veterans' Home
 - ✓ Public or private institution for mental disease

Senior Household Size	Senior Benefits Program Gross Annual Income Limit Effective 4/1/2017		
	The income limit changed April 1, 2017 due to a change in the Federal Poverty Limit		
	\$250 monthly payment	\$175 monthly payment	\$76 monthly payment
Individual	\$11,295 (\$942 per month)	\$15,060 (\$1,255 per month)	\$26,355 (\$2,197 per month)
Married Couple	\$15,218 (\$1,269 per month)	\$20,290 (\$1,691 per month)	\$35,508 (\$2,959 per month)

Senior Household Size	Senior Benefits Program Gross Annual Income Limit Effective 8/1/2016 *Benefit change effective August 1, 2016 due to final state budget		
	\$250 monthly payment	\$175 monthly payment	*\$76 monthly payment
Individual	\$11,130 (\$928 per month)	\$14,840 (\$1,237 per month)	\$25,970 (\$2,165 per month)
Married Couple	\$15,015 (\$1,252 per month)	\$20,020 (\$1,669 per month)	\$35,035 (\$2,920 per month)

Senior Household Size	Senior Benefits Program Gross Annual Income Limit Effective 4/1/2016 The income limit changed April 1, 2016 due to a change in the Federal Poverty Limit		
	\$250 monthly payment	\$175 monthly payment	\$47 monthly payment
Individual	\$11,130 (\$928 per month)	\$14,840 (\$1,237 per month)	\$25,970 (\$2,165 per month)
Married Couple	\$15,015 (\$1,252 per month)	\$20,020 (\$1,669 per month)	\$35,035 (\$2,920 per month)

Senior Household Size	Senior Benefits Program Gross Annual Income Limit Effective 3/1/2016 *Benefit change effective March 1, 2016 due to budget shortfall, caseload increase		
	\$250 monthly payment	\$175 monthly payment	*\$47 monthly payment
Individual	\$11,040 (\$920 per month)	\$14,720 (\$1,227 per month)	\$25,760 (\$2,146 per month)
Married Couple	\$14,940 (\$1,245 per month)	\$19,920 (\$1,660 per month)	\$34,860 (\$2,905 per month)

Senior Benefits recipients as of April 2017

- 11,412 recipients. Number and percent of seniors at each payment level:
 - ✓ \$250 – 1,655 (14.5%)
 - ✓ \$175 – 4,935 (43.2%)
 - ✓ \$76 – 4,822 (42.3%)
- As of April 2017, the average age of recipients is 75 and the maximum age is 103.
- The number of Senior Benefits cases have been increasing each year until 2017. All figures are for April:

✓ 2017 – 11,412	✓ 2014 – 11,119
✓ 2016 – 11,855	✓ 2013 – 10,896
✓ 2015 – 11,366	✓ 2012 – 10,651

Recipients statewide as of April 2017:

Census Area	Number of Recipients	Census Area	Number of Recipients
Aleutians East	24	Lake and Peninsula	36
Aleutians West	30	Mat-Su	1,583
Anchorage	4,231	Nome	237
Bethel	526	North Slope	33
Bristol Bay	10	NW Arctic	158
Denali	16	Petersburg	89
Dillingham	116	Prince of Wales	206
Fairbanks N Star	872	SE Fairbanks	206
Haines	84	Sitka	98
Hoonah-Angoon	76	Skagway	8
Juneau	349	Valez / Cordova	156
Kenai	1,177	Wrangell	87
Ketchikan Gateway	269	Yakutat	16
Kodiak	236	Yukon / Koyukuk	252
Kusilvak	231	GRAND TOTAL	11,412

History of the Senior Benefits Program	
1972 - 2003	Alaska Longevity Bonus Program. Established in 1972. Alaska residents became eligible at age 65. \$250/month was issued to seniors who applied before 1994, \$200 to those applying in 1994, \$150 to those applying in 1995, and \$100 to those applying in 1996. Payments were not available to seniors who applied after 1996. The program was subsequently defunded in 2003, and final benefits were issued for the month of August 2003.
2003 - 2004	Senior Assistance Program. Beginning September 2003, the Governor's office used its executive authority to establish the needs-based Senior Assistance program in response to the needs of low-income Alaskans aged 65 and older who were financially impacted by the elimination of the Alaska Longevity Bonus. Payments were limited to \$120/month. The program ended March 2004.
2004 - 2007	SeniorCare Program. Beginning April 2004, the SeniorCare Program was established to replace the former Senior Assistance Program. The new program was expanded to include a prescription drug benefit. Low-income seniors that passed the program's income and resource limits could choose to receive either a \$120/month payment or a prescription drug benefit. The program ended July 2007.
2007 - Present	Senior Benefits Program. Established to replace the SeniorCare Program. Began August 2007; up for reauthorization in June 2018. Provides three payment levels based on the senior's gross annual income. Income limits are tied to the Federal Poverty Guidelines for Alaska and change each year as the poverty level changes. There is no asset test. Regulation change finalized January 2016 described how benefits would be reduced by appropriation shortfall. Due to caseload increase, the highest income level that normally receives a \$125 benefit had the benefit reduced to \$47 effective March 1, 2016. The budgets for state fiscal years 2017 and 2018 allowed for a monthly payment of \$76 to recipients in the highest income level.



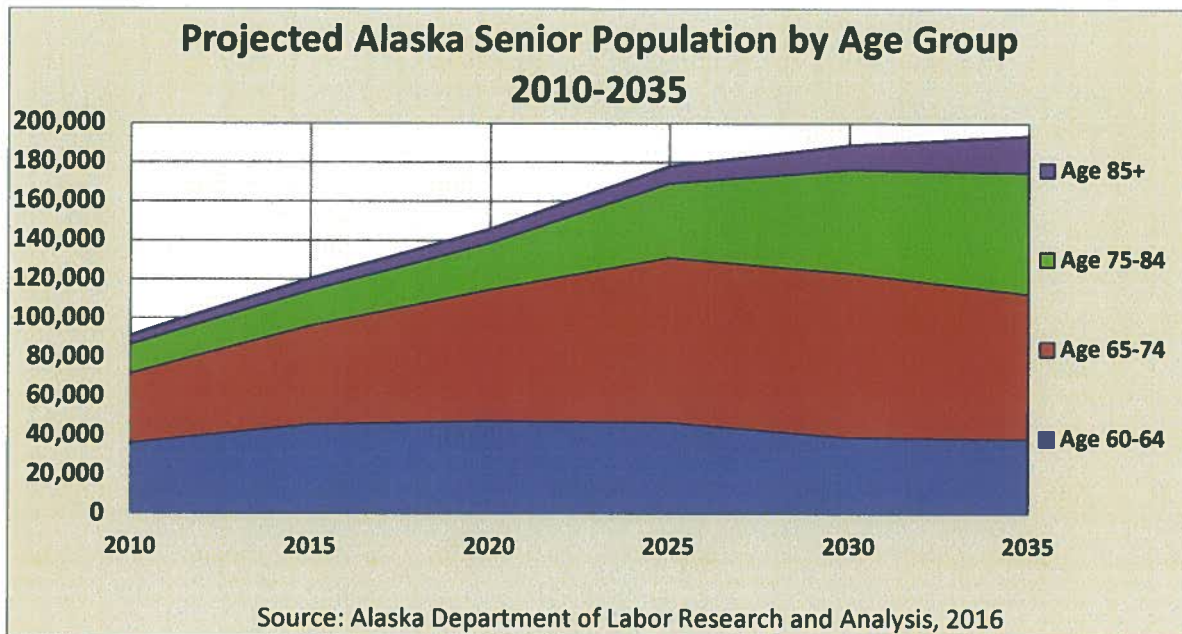
Alaska Commission on Aging SFY2017 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

Preserve the *Senior Safety Net* for vulnerable older Alaskans

As people age, they become more at risk for chronic diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, as well as other disabling conditions. Older people living on fixed incomes are also at an increased risk for poverty. This "Net" provides critical financial assistance and home- and community-based long-term support services to vulnerable older Alaskans. These core services prevent seniors from becoming Medicaid eligible and requiring higher cost care. When these services are reduced or eliminated, older people become more at risk for declining health and impairment, which, in turn, increases the burden of care on family and other natural caregivers, and raises the possibility for expensive out-of-home placement.

Recommendations: Maintain programs that provide appropriate long-term support services, improve access to health care, and offer financial assistance to Alaska seniors living on small fixed incomes.

- Sustain base funding for the **Senior Community Based Grants** (Division of Senior and Disabilities Services) that provide senior meals, transportation, adult day, respite, and homemaker services as these services target the most vulnerable, many of whom are homebound, and provide support to family and other natural support caregivers.
- Preserve funding for the **1915(c) Adults Living Independently Waiver** (Division of Senior and Disabilities Services) that provides essential services to Alaskans age 21 and older who meet eligibility requirements and choose to receive services provided in their homes and in the community rather than institutional settings.
- Uphold funding for **Medicaid Optional Services** that include Personal Care Services, waiver services, Medicaid Adult Dental, hospice, podiatry, and the proposed 1915(k) to refinance waiver and Personal Care Services. Medicare does not cover the cost for most dental services. Retired seniors on a fixed income often go without.
- Sustain funding for **Senior Benefits** (Division of Public Assistance) to help low-income seniors pay for food, housing, heat, and prescribed medications. Reauthorize Senior Benefits which is scheduled to sunset on June 30, 2017. The Governor's FY2018 budget includes a reduction of \$43,200 for Senior Benefits.
- Move forward with implementation of the **Medicaid 1915(k) state plan option** by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services for Personal Care Services and Consumer-Directed Personal Care Services as recommended in the *Health Management Associates Implementation Plan (September 2016)* to realize an enhanced 6% Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) to replace declining general funds.
- Include **assistive and tele-health technologies** in the senior service array to support seniors in their efforts to live independently at home and in the community. Many assistive technologies are low cost, offer significant savings, and provide support for caregivers.
- Protect Older Alaskans from financial exploitation, abuse, and harm by maintaining appropriate base funding for **Adult Protective Services (APS)** (Senior and Disabilities Services), **Office of Long-Term Care Ombudsman (OLTCO)** (Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority), and the **Office of Elder Fraud and Abuse** (Office of Public Advocacy).
- Retain \$1 million AHFC capital funding for **Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund** as proposed in the Governor's FY18 budget to match \$1.75 million from the Rasmuson Foundation. This funding provides critical gap financing for the construction and renovation of affordable senior housing statewide.



What is the estimated cost to provide long-term support services for seniors?

Program in FY2016	Number of Seniors Served	Average annual cost/person	Total Costs
Senior Community-Based Grants (age 60+)	27,091	\$435	\$11,784,585
Personal Care Services (age 60+)	3,261	\$18,183	\$59,294,763
Alaskans Living Independently (ALI) Waiver (age 65+)	1,428	\$32,868	\$46,935,504
Alaska Pioneer Homes (December 2016, age 65+)	Level 1: 54 residents Level 2: 118 residents Level 3: 252 residents	\$77,981 \$103,014 \$161,942	\$57,176,010
Nursing Home Residents (Medicaid recipients only, age 60+)	622	\$153,009	\$95,171,598
Total Costs of Care			\$270,362,460
Total if all seniors eligible for nursing home and the ALI waiver received services in the nursing home.			\$444,480,723

Source: Division of Senior & Disabilities Services (December 2016 & January 2017) and the Alaska Pioneer Homes (December 2016) using a format developed by SDS for the continuum of care and adapted by ACoA for senior services.



Alaska Commission on Aging SFY2017 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

Provide appropriate supports for family and other caregivers caring for older Alaskans

Family caregiving is the foundation of long-term care in Alaska. Approximately 84,900 Alaskans (or 12% of the state's total population) care for vulnerable older Alaskans who live with a physical, mental, and/or cognitive impairment. This care is valued at more than \$1 billion annually (AARP 2015). An estimated 33,000 Alaskans care for an elderly loved one with dementia (Alzheimer's Facts and Figures 2016). As Alaska's population ages, family caregiving and natural supports are becoming increasingly important in the care of Alaskans at home with chronic health conditions, physical disabilities, and cognitive impairments. While many families provide compassionate care for their elderly loved ones, caregiving can take a significant toll. Research indicates that family caregivers of older adults – particularly those who care for loved ones with dementia – are more likely to report poor health, higher rates of chronic disease, as well as depression and anxiety than non-caregivers. Family caregivers of significantly impaired older adults are also vulnerable to financial stress due to lost wages and benefits when they cut back on work hours or leave the workplace due to caregiving demands.

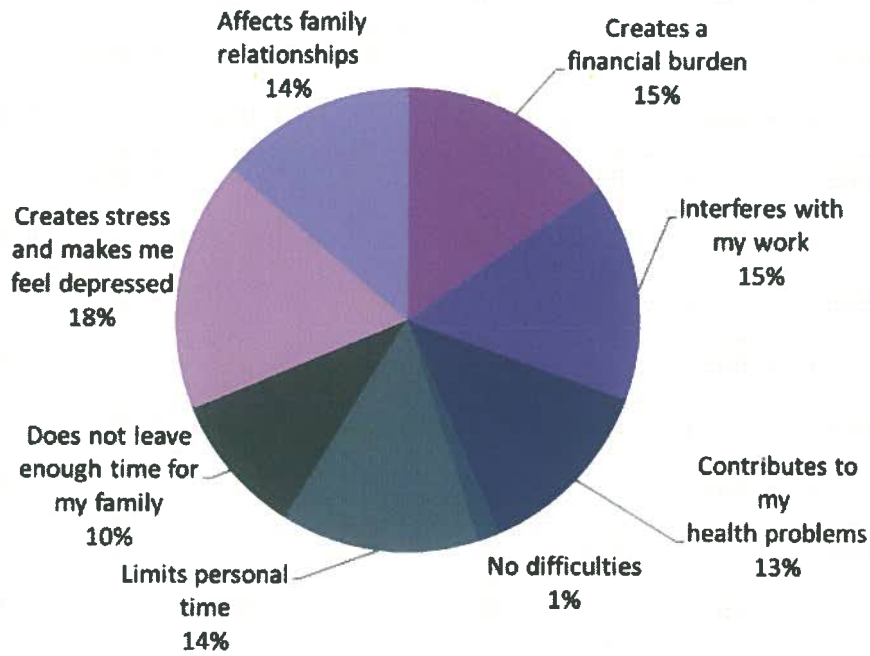
Research shows that investment in caregiver supports produces a positive return. Family and other natural caregivers who receive training and supportive services are better able to provide care at home improving the quality of life and safety for both the caregiver and the person under their care, providing a huge cost savings by preventing the need for premature institutional care. If the needs of caregivers are not addressed, we risk compromising the safety and well-being of seniors and their families.

Recommendations: The Alaska Commission on Aging supports efforts to

- (1) Maintain base funding for the **National Family Caregiver Support Grant Program**, administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services Senior Community Grants Program, which provides caregiver training, respite, case management, counseling, peer supports, and adult day. These services support unpaid caregivers caring for their elderly loved ones at home.
- (2) Adopt a *uniform family caregiver assessment tool* to identify caregiver needs and provide person- and family-centered caregiver support and training. These services will equip families and other natural caregivers with the resources they need to provide safe and quality care at home for as long as possible to prevent the need for early out-of-home placement. (Alaska has the highest cost of nursing home in the nation. Annual median cost for skilled nursing home care in Alaska is \$297,840 per individual, according to Genworth Long-Term Care Cost Survey, 2016.)*
- (3) Utilize *telehealth and assistive technologies* to enhance safety, quality of life, and reduce the burden on family and other natural caregivers. These technologies improve efficiencies and generate cost savings.
- (4) Encourage home- and community-based service providers to engage caregivers.*

*Based on recommendations from *Families Caring for an Aging America Report, September 2016* published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicines.

What is the most difficult challenge you face as a caregiver?



Source: Findings from the Alaska Commission on Aging Family Caregiver Survey conducted in 2013 and published in *Alaska's Roadmap to Address Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia*, 2014.

