
Smart Spending on Community Support Services for Vulnerable Alaskans

What are community support services?

- Mental health and addiction treatment
- Assisted living/group homes
- Day habilitation/adult day programs
- Housing and heating assistance
- Personal care attendants
- Case management/care coordination
- Peer/mentor support
- Transportation support
- Home-delivered and congregate meals
- Supported employment/job coaching

Community support services are less expensive than institutional care

- Community behavioral health treatment and rehabilitative services cost 20-50% less than a psychiatric hospital for people with severe mental illness.¹
- Community supports for seniors can cost half to one-fourth less than nursing home care.²
- There will always be public costs serving people with disabilities—either on the front end with community supports, or on the back end with expensive institutional care.

Community support services provide local jobs

- Community services provide jobs for health care professionals and paraprofessionals, all of whom contribute to a healthy workforce and strong Alaskan economy.
- Reducing community support services not only affects citizens with disabilities and their families who struggle to support family members living at home, but affects jobs in the community for service providers.

What happens when community support services are cut?

- Alaska's most vulnerable citizens are more likely to end up in expensive psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, emergency rooms, jail or prison—often at state expense.
- Alaskan jobs in local communities in the health care field are lost when grants and other state funds are cut.
- A family can lose their ability to care for a senior or disabled family member at home.
- Alaskans transitioning from corrections, juvenile justice, or therapeutic court programs are more likely to recidivate and return to jail or prison.

Community support services help vulnerable Alaskans live safely in the community and out of expensive institutional care

The Alaska Mental Health Trust and partner advisory boards support community support services that help “level the playing field” for vulnerable Alaskans—people with mental illness, substance use disorders (SUD), intellectual-developmental disabilities (IDD), Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia (ADRD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD), etc.

Community support services are less expensive than institutional care and provide jobs for health care professionals and paraprofessionals—all of whom contribute to a healthy workforce and strong Alaskan economy.

These services include assisted living, housing and job assistance, addiction and mental health treatment, family caregiver and natural supports, case management, education and training for direct service providers, peer support, personal care attendants, caregiver respite, transportation, home-delivered meals, and adult day programs.

When community-based support services are reduced or eliminated, Alaska’s most vulnerable citizens are more likely to be served in psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, out-of-state residential care, or jails and prison—usually at state expense. Also,

people with disabilities are at higher risk for homelessness and having their medical needs served in expensive hospital emergency rooms. A family with a senior with ADRD can lose their ability to care for their loved one at home and justice-involved individuals struggling with addiction are more likely to relapse, commit new crimes, and return to jail or prison.

The State will pay for its vulnerable citizens either way—on the front end with less expensive community services, or on the back-end with more expensive institutional care.

Comparing the cost of community versus institutional care, behavioral health treatment and rehabilitative services cost 20-50% less than a psychiatric hospital for people with severe mental illness,¹ and community supports for seniors can cost half to one-fourth less than nursing home care.²

As lawmakers reflect on budget decisions, advocates stress the importance of supporting community-based support services so people with disabilities are served appropriately and cost-effectively, and can remain safe, stable, and productive members of their communities. ❖

Support community services that help Alaskans live safely in their communities, and out of expensive state-funded institutional care.

¹ Comparing outpatient mental health services provided by community behavioral health centers, clinics, and psychologists (average SFY2016 annual cost of \$8,478 per person) to inpatient psychiatric treatment at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute (average SFY2016 annual cost of \$24,800 per person) and residential psychiatric treatment center services (average 2010 annual cost of \$61,985 per person). Source: Department of Health and Social Services Division of Behavioral Health Overview, Presentation to the Alaska Legislature, January 31, 2017.

² Comparing home and community-based services like personal care attendants (average SFY2016 annual cost \$18,183 per person) and Medicaid waiver services (average SFY2016 annual cost ranging from \$32,868 to \$110,849 per person) to skilled nursing facility costs (average SFY2016 annual cost \$153,009 per person). Source: Department of Health and Social Services Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, Presentation to the Alaska Legislature, February 9, 2017.

For more information, go to: www.alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/jointadvocacy