



Aging With Dignity And Independence

PRESENTATION TO AMHTA

AUGUST 28, 2024

# Updates from ACoA

*Did you know we have a  
Facebook & E-blast?*

“The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is 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.”

## -New Commissioners

## -Transportation Teleconference: DOT

- Quarterly Teleconference August 8<sup>th</sup> featuring Eric Taylor, Multimodal Planning Chief, Transit Programs at DOT
- **Human Services Grant Intent to Apply / Call for Pre-Applications is currently open through September 23<sup>rd</sup>** (required of all applicants)  
<https://aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/Notices/View.aspx?id=216422>

What does aging in your community look like?

Do you know what ADRC stands for?

Are you familiar with the Alzheimer's mini grant?

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ADRCs, Disability & Aging Summit

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Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program – Food Security & Access

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ALFs in Rural Communities, Dementia Advocacy

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ADAC Communication updates

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Title III and Title VI Collaboration, Election Season

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Upcoming Meeting: Kotzebue in September

# Aging & Disability Resource Centers

## **Data from May 2024:**

88.9% of staff rated the ability to meet community needs at 3 or above (scale of 1-5, 5 being best), indicating some confidence but also room for improvement. Only 55.6% of respondents rated community support at 3 or above, highlighting a significant area for improvement in fostering community engagement. 66.7% of respondents rated the education on senior resources at 3 or above, suggesting a need for better dissemination of information regarding senior services. Only 40% of respondents rated seniors' needs being met at 3 or above, indicating a critical area that requires immediate attention. 60% of respondents rated the health and happiness of seniors at 3 or above, indicating relatively better areas but still needing support.

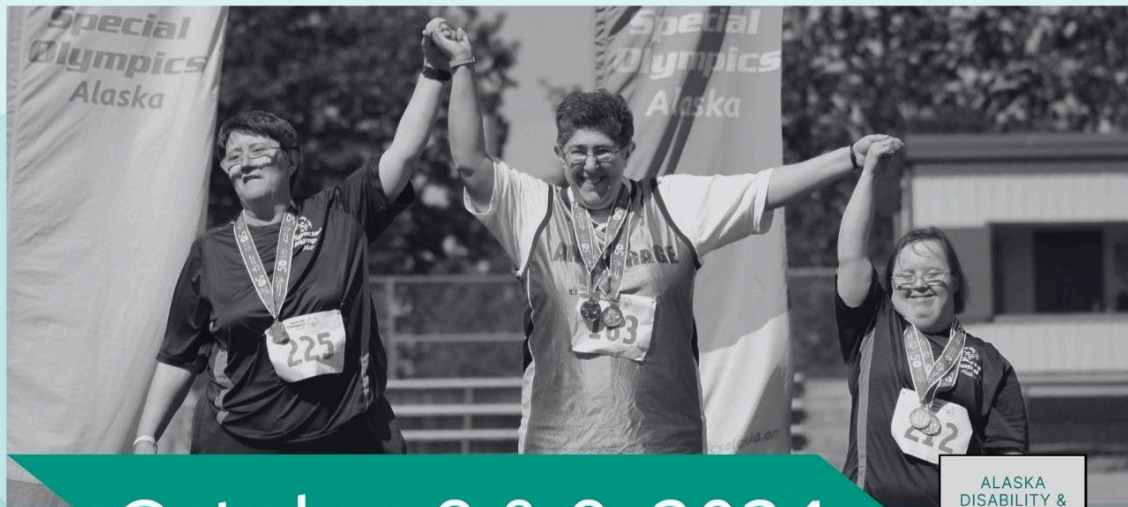
**Health and Financials:** COVID-19 has exacerbated mental health issues among seniors, highlighting gaps in healthcare and support systems. 66.7% of respondents indicated an increase in depression among seniors post-COVID.

Respondents suggest changing rules around asset limits and benefit eligibility to better support seniors slightly above current thresholds.

## **Upcoming Conference:** Disability & Aging Summit Oct 8-9<sup>th</sup>, 2024

This event connects leaders in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities with care providers, agencies, families and individuals with intellectual disabilities to have powerful discussions about issues individuals with intellectual disabilities in Alaska are facing as they age, while raising awareness, and working on solutions to knit the aging and disability service systems together.

# 10th Annual Alaska Disability & Aging Summit!



October 8 & 9, 2024



**Presented by:**  
**The Alaska Disability & Aging Coalition**

# 2024 ALASKA SENIOR FARMERS' MARKET NUTRITION PROGRAM

## Senior Distribution Centers

### Mat-Su

#### Sunshine Clinic

Servicing Willow, Talkeetna, Trapper Creek, Susitna North

#### TALKEETNA

Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm  
34300 South Talkeetna Spur Rd  
Talkeetna, Alaska 99676  
Phone: 907-733-2273

#### WILLOW

Monday–Friday, 8am–5PM  
24091 Long Lake Rd  
Willow Alaska 99688  
Phone: 907-495-4100

#### Wasilla Area Seniors

Servicing Servicing Willow, Knik-Fairview, Fishhook, Farmloop

Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm  
1301 S Century Cir  
Wasilla, AK 99654  
Phone: 907-206-8800

#### Mat-Su Senior Services

Servicing Palmer, Butte, Sutton-Alpine, Chickaloon, Glacier View, Lake Louise

Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm  
1132 S. Chugach St  
Palmer, AK 99645  
Phone: 907-745-5454

#### Mat-Su Health Services

Servicing Houston, Big Lake, Meadowlakes

Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm  
1363 W Spruce Ave  
Wasilla, AK 99654  
Phone: 907-352-3247  
Email: info@matsuhealthservices.org

### Kenai

#### Kenai Senior Center

Servicing Kenai Peninsula–West

Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm  
361 Senior Ct, Kenai, AK 99611  
Phone: 907-283-8212

### Seward

#### Seward Community Health Center

Servicing Kenai Peninsula–East, Seward, Whittier

Monday–Friday, 8am–6pm  
417 1st Ave, Seward, AK 99664  
Phone: 907-224-2273

### Fairbanks

#### North Star Council on Aging

Servicing Fairbanks, North Star Borough, College, Aurora

Monday–Friday, 8am–4pm  
1424 Moore St, Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Phone: 907-452-1735

#### Fairbanks Native Association

Servicing Fairbanks, North Pole

Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm  
43100 S Cushman St, Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Phone: 907-452-1648

### Anchorage

#### Food Bank of Alaska

Servicing Anchorage Municipality

Monday–Friday, 8am–4pm  
2192 Viking Dr, Anchorage, AK 99501  
Phone: 907-272-3663

People age 60 or older on or before Sept. 30th, who either actively participate in CSFP **or** whose gross income is below [185% of the federal poverty level](#) (Alaska max for 1 Person annual gross income is \$34,799) are eligible for the \$40 fresh produce vouchers to use in their local community. Visit [this post](#) to see the list of 2024 distribution sites. If a senior needs someone to pick up their vouchers and produce, make sure they fill out a [Proxy Form](#). Coupons are valid to use by October 31st. Your community needs both a local authorized farm stand which accepts the vouchers, and an authorized distribution site, who distributes the coupons or vouchers to seniors and their proxies in order to spend at the farm stand. Participating vendors must produce a minimum of one-third (33%) of their own produce, and have a consistent vendor location and open business hours for the duration of eight weeks between July and October. The application for 2025 vendors is open from February 1st through May 15th.

## Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program



**Will you be 60 years of age or older by September 30, 2024?**

Do you like fresh fruits and veggies but purchasing these items are a little hard on your pocketbook?

If you answered yes to both of the questions above, you will be happy to hear that the Kenai Senior Center is again a distributing agency for Farmer's Market-Coupons!

Coupons will be available after July 1 and are valid through October 31st.

For more information about the program and to inquire as to whether you are eligible, please call the Kenai Senior Center at (907) 283-4156.

**\*New at the Kenai Senior Center this year:**



**Grace Acres Farm** will be at the Kenai Senior Center on Mondays beginning July 22nd 10am-2pm.

This vendor accepts Farmers Market Coupons, cash, credit/debit cards and SNAP cards with double value for SNAP benefits.



**Are you currently age 60 (on or before Sept 30th) or older and want free, local produce this summer? Call the Kenai Senior Center 907-283-4156 to see if you qualify for summer 2024 senior nutrition program vouchers to use at a local farmers market!**

**Runs July - October**





# Agnes Sweetsir and Galena's assisted living journey

Story and photos by YASMIN RADBOD

For Senior Voice

In 2009, Agnes Sweetsir noticed that the Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility (YKEALF) in Galena was empty. "It just sat and sat," she recalls. "I lived right down the street and was embarrassed. It was just a monster of a building."

Agnes prayed on it. "I figured I could help get it up and running for a few months, but I didn't realize we needed an administrator." She took on the role. "I worked 60 to 80 hours a week for \$25,000 a year. Charlie Green was our maintenance manager—same pay. We never would've made it if they had tried paying us a half-decent salary."

Fifteen years later, Agnes is retiring and reflects on her journey.

"I knew about Elders, but not the industry. It was hard to find information on regulations because people haven't been doing assisted living here. Things like average water usage, no one knew. Then there's the design. We had to take off all the glass doors. In the winter, we put Styrofoam on the windows to insulate. It's not pretty, but we need to do it."

Agnes spent countless hours researching and



Agnes Sweetsir stands outside the Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility in Galena, where she has dedicated 15 years ensuring its success.

networking. Her family's support was invaluable, she says.

"This is a business. In any business, you need to create a product or service that people will be willing to invest in and purchase. I knew a little about accounting, supervision, and HR. And I am very resourceful. One of the first things I did was meet with our board and go through the process of crafting their mission statement and values. We're a private nonprofit licensed by the state, and a 501c3. Foundations and agencies are out there to help but you need to be either or both a 501c3 and a private nonprofit."

**Community effort**  
A crucial aspect of the Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility's success is its community involvement. The facility sources about 80% of its protein locally. Folks provide fresh moose, fish, baked goods, and berries.

"If we're short-staffed, people volunteer to help cook and clean. Having traditional Native food makes a big difference," Agnes says. "One resident calls it their 'spiritual food.' Young Elders from the community provide emotional support for both residents and staff, especially during end-of-life care. Before our facility existed, families would struggle. People had to move their loved ones out

of town. If I had stayed my parents' caregiver, I would've been dead before them. Both my parents spent their final days at YKEALF. It was beautiful."

The 2013 flood posed a significant challenge, causing housing shortages and increased maintenance costs, Agnes says. "We would've sunk if we didn't have property insurance. This is a high-risk industry and insurance is absolutely necessary."

### Trainings and resources

Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility also owns a four-apartment housing complex for staff. Some workers are related to the residents, Agnes says.

"Our facility is one of the few in the country that is truly culturally relevant. Staff work long hours and deal with a lot. We teach them in orientation to not take things personally.



One of the first things Agnes did in her position was help the board design their values, philosophy and mission.

People suffering from dementia would never normally act like that, it's the disease."

The facility originally developed a dementia-friendly community with help from Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska, Agnes says.

"Our staff was trained, and we also offered trainings at the community hall for health clinic staff, churches, and families to learn about dementia. Even our store clerk was familiar with ADRD (Alzheimer's disease and related dementia). It was very progressive because the public was not afraid. They learned to recognize the signs and knew what to do."

The "Five Wishes" living will to help residents communicate their end-of-life care preferences has been critical, Agnes says. "More and more, we take our residents through that process. Those kinds of activities bring people peace. I think they live longer because of that—they're not worried about what will happen in the future."

Agnes remains available as a resource for those interested in starting ALFs in their communities. She recommends Teepa Snow and Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska's "Savvy Caregivers" training.

Chassidy and Ginger, who have been with Yukon Koyukuk Elder Assisted Living Facility and are committed to its mission, will take over as co-administrators as Agnes retires. They plan to expand to 20 beds, the original intended size of the facility. Agnes is confident in their ability to continue the work, noting their dedication and love for the Elders.

"It's the littlest amount of money I've ever made in my life, but it's the most rewarding job I've ever had," she says. "I go to bed at night knowing that I have made a positive difference in someone's life. It really mattered what I did, and they can't pay you enough for that."

Agnes Sweetsir can be reached at 907-656-7449 and asweetsir.ykealf@gmail.com. Contact Riki Chapman for UAA's three-part Dementia Skills Training for Assisted Living Homes (based on Teepa Snow's method of Positive Approach to Care®) at racook@alaska.edu or 907-264-6257.

See the online version of this article at seniorvoicealaska.com for recipes from YKEALF's cookbook.

Yasmin Radbod is the Alaska Commission on Aging Rural Outreach Coordinator.



Agnes, third from right, with staff and residents enjoying a summer day with a beautiful view of the river.

# News: Agnes Sweetsir Retires from YKEALF

## What is the future of rural and remote Alaskan ALFs?







“What’s that flyer say again?”

# HEALTHY AGING CHECKLIST

Alaska  
Commission  
On Aging  
Aging With Dignity And Independence

Follow us on Facebook: The Alaska Commission on Aging 

## Essentials

- Get a physical at least once a year & stay active focusing on: aerobics, muscle strength, balance
- Eat local, traditional foods: berries, mushrooms, fish, eggs, wild game, fiddleheads
- Call **Assistive Technology of Alaska** for free support with hearing & vision devices: 907- 563-2599
- Are you 55+ and seeking employment? Call **MASST: 907-465-4872**
- Volunteer! Mentor youth at school or become a Senior Companion (55+), earn a tax-free stipend & more benefits at **eldermentor.org, 907-717-7932**
- Need dental support? If 65+ or permanently disabled or need medically necessary dental care: call **877-977-3802, dentallifeline.org/alaska/**



**Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska:**  
Free memory screenings & support available  
Call: 800-478-1080

## Brain Health



### Alzheimer's Cognitive Assessment

A healthcare guide to detecting cognitive impairment  
[alz.org/media/Documents/cognitive-assessment-toolkit.pdf](http://alz.org/media/Documents/cognitive-assessment-toolkit.pdf)



### Alzheimer's Caregiver Resource Guide

To share with caregivers of people with AD/DR  
[alzalaska.org/caregiver-resource-guide/](http://alzalaska.org/caregiver-resource-guide/)



### Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska Mini Grants

\$2500 awarded monthly for caregivers and people with AD/DR, can be used widely, eligible once a year  
[alzalaska.org/minigrants/](http://alzalaska.org/minigrants/)

Alaska Legal Services Corporation's  
Community Justice Worker Project trains  
volunteers online for free in several areas  
of law including Will Writing. Visit  
<https://www.alsc-law.org/community-justice-worker-program/>

Are you turning 65 and seeking support  
with Medicare? Call the Medicare  
Information Office at 800-478-6065  
and leave a message with your info.

## Financial & Legal

*What happens when you pass away?*



### Write your Will

[alaskalawhelp.org/classroom/preparing-your-own-will](http://alaskalawhelp.org/classroom/preparing-your-own-will)

The Alzheimer's Association free  
24/7 Helpline is 800-272-3900,  
offering support for people living with  
dementia, caregivers, families & the  
public.

## News



### Directory for Older Alaskans

Visit [seniorvoicealaska.com](http://seniorvoicealaska.com)  
and click on "Directory" at the  
top of the page

*The Senior Voice is a statewide senior newspaper  
delivered to every zip code in Alaska. Call 907-276-1059*

*What happens if you are incapacitated?*



### Create your Advance Health Care Directive

[alaskalawhelp.org/resource/alaska-advance-health-care-directive](http://alaskalawhelp.org/resource/alaska-advance-health-care-directive)



### Senior Benefits - Are you 65+?

[health.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/seniorbenefits/default.aspx](http://health.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/seniorbenefits/default.aspx)  
Call the Virtual Relay Center 800-478-7778 to see  
if you qualify for payments!

**Call ADRC for all your senior & disability related needs: 855-565-2017**



### ANTHC Advance Care Planning Resources

[anthc.org/palliative-care/resources/](http://anthc.org/palliative-care/resources/)

Do you have feedback on this Healthy Aging Checklist? Email [yasmin.radbod@alaska.gov](mailto:yasmin.radbod@alaska.gov) or call 907-230-0871. Thank you!



The evolution  
of the  
*Healthy Aging  
Checklist*,  
expanding our  
reach &  
number of  
partners

# Virtual Dementia Tour - AFN

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ACoA and our partners [Alzheimer's Resource of Alaska](#), [AN CARE Lab](#) and APIA are working together to bring the [Virtual Dementia Tour \(VDT\)](#) to downtown Anchorage during the [FAI Elders and Youth Conference](#) Oct 13-16th and [AFN Convention](#) Oct 17-19th both happening at Denai'na Center. It's a simulation of what it's like to live with dementia, and can be a powerful tool for people of all ages and backgrounds to experience, especially family caregivers and people who work in the field. Unfortunately VDT is not allowed to be physically offered at a conference. However, we are working with Anchorage Human Rights Commission to use an available space across the street from Dena'ina Center in City Hall.

# Title III & VI... and Election Season!

WE'RE IDENTIFYING  
UNDERSERVED  
COMMUNITIES THAT  
COULD BE ACCESSING  
ADDITIONAL FUNDS LIKE  
TITLE VI, BUT  
CURRENTLY AREN'T.  
WORKING WITH ACL  
AND UNIVERSITY  
PARTNERS, WE ARE  
LOOKING FORWARD TO  
SUPPORTING ALASKANS  
IN THE UPCOMING  
FY27-29 TITLE VI GRANT  
APPLICATION.

We're working closely with SDS Grants Unit to support the goals and visions of providers, state agencies and other partners in creating a statewide gathering of senior service providers, potentially every three years. We are excited to support local and regional partners in developing virtual calls and in-person meetings as well.

We're helping Fairbanks Senior Center and Foundation Health Partners host educational forums for local borough and municipal candidates, and state legislative candidates.

Fairbanks is bridging the gap on III and VI collaboration thanks to partnerships like Fairbanks Senior Center and Fairbanks Native Association. Now that the Senior Center is revamped and open once more, we are focusing on supporting their growth in clientele moving forward.

# Coming up...

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Quarterly Commission Meeting - Kotzebue: Sept 10-12<sup>th</sup>

Sept 10: Arrival in Kotz, local meetings

Sept 11: Quarterly Commission Meeting and visit local housing

Sept 12: Commissioners divide and visit Selawik and Kivalina

We will have an outreach table at Improving Lives!

Alzheimer's Association Regional Asst. Director Michelle Larson is in Alaska for the month of September offering caregiving trainings and other presentations: [mllarson@alz.org](mailto:mllarson@alz.org)



Jon Haghayeghi, Executive Director  
jon.haghayeghi@alaska.gov

**Mission:** 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.

### *Who We Are*

The *Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)* was established in 1982 and is authorized by AS 47.45.200. The ACoA is tasked with evaluating federal and state programs impacting the lives of Alaskan seniors (including those who experience Alzheimer’s disease and related disorders) and their caregivers.

*The Alaska Commission on Aging* advocates for policies, programs and services that promote health, independence and full participation for all Alaskan seniors. The Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) is the federally designated State Unit as required by the Older American’s Act, and shares the responsibilities of this designation between the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (DSDS) and the ACoA.

The *Alaska Commission on Aging* represents senior beneficiaries and provides to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, for its review and consideration, recommendations concerning the integrated comprehensive mental health program and the use of the money in the mental health trust settlement income account in a manner consistent with regulations adopted under AS [47.30.031](#) .

The ACoA consists of eleven members, seven of whom are public members (with six members being 60 years and older) appointed by the Governor to serve four-year terms. Two seats are filled by the Commissioners of the Departments of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and Commerce, Community and Economic Development, or their designees. The remaining seats are reserved for the Chair of the Alaska Pioneer Homes Advisory Board and a senior services provider, regardless of age.

### *How We Do Our Work*

The *Alaska Commission on Aging* meets regularly during the year to hear from state agencies, service providers and Alaskans to discuss the needs for Alaska’s rapidly growing senior population. Board members engage with the Governor, Alaska State Legislature and state agencies to educate and advise on the needs of these Alaskans and those who serve them. Staff work with board members and other stakeholders throughout the year on

planning and coordinating efforts including serving on statewide councils, taskforces and coalitions, data collection and assessment, statewide coordination, planning and program evaluation.

### *Core Services*

- Advocates for the needs and concerns of older Alaskans to the Governor, the Legislature, the Administration, Alaska's Congressional delegation, and the public.
- Advises the Governor, the Legislature, the Administration, the Congressional delegation and the public on current and potential programs and services for older Alaskans and their caregivers.
- Prepares a comprehensive four-year state plan for senior services in accordance with the Older Americans Act and implements the Plan in collaboration with agency partners to improve services for older Alaskans and reduce duplication of effort.
- Provides recommendations to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) for the integrated comprehensive mental health plan and identifies issues, proposes projects and submits budget recommendations that use funding from the mental health trust settlement account for services provided to older Alaskans with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias and other behavioral health conditions.
- Gathers, analyzes and reports data about programs and services impacting the health, safety and quality of life for older Alaskans.
- Surveys Alaska seniors and analyzes their responses to identify priority issues, needs and concerns.
- Reviews and provides comment on proposed regulations relating to programs and services affecting older Alaskans.
- Promotes public awareness of aging issues and trends and provides information to the public and policy makers on senior issues including health, financial security, and housing.

### *Looking Forward*

Alaska continues to be the state with the fastest-growing senior population. As Alaska's population continues to age, economic challenges and new technologies will shape our programs and services. The Commission supports evidence-based prevention strategies across the lifespan, and those specifically tailored for older adults to reduce preventable chronic diseases and disabilities, lower associated health care costs, and improve quality of life.

Investing in home and community-based services to provide person-centered care for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders and their caregivers, in addition to other supportive services, are crucial to enabling Alaska's older population to remain with their families and in their communities.