

Governor's Housing Summit Update
Senior Housing Workgroup Summary
Challenges, Opportunities & Strategies for Developing Sustainable Senior Housing
January 18, 2017

Housing is a top priority for Alaska seniors. A growing number of seniors are choosing to remain in Alaska and appropriate, affordable, and accessible housing is a critical need statewide. According to the latest findings from the Alaska Senior Survey conducted by the Alaska Commission on Aging, more than 70% of the seniors surveyed want to “age in place” and remain in their own home and community as they age to be close to family, friends, and traditions.

Alaska has the fastest-growing senior population in the United States largely due to the migration of young people who moved to the state during the economic boom of the 1970s for newly-created jobs in every sector. The senior population has expanded because of an increasing number of Alaskan boomers now reaching senior age and more of them choosing to remain in the state. Within the Alaska population's age groups, the senior sectors are also growing far more rapidly than any other age group. For example, between 2000 and 2010 census years, Alaska's overall population increased by 13.3%. Children under age 18 actually decreased by 1.8%, people age 18 through 34 increased by 21.3%, those age 35 through 59 increased by 7.4%, and seniors age 60+ increased by 71.4%. The oldest group of seniors, those age 85 and older, increased by 78.9%. In 2016, an estimated one in six Alaskans is of senior-age.

Access to safe, quality, affordable housing is one of the most powerful social determinants of health. For an older adult, housing can significantly influence their health and health trajectory. Accessible and supportive housing, in combination with appropriate and flexible long-term support services and transportation, is increasingly recognized as a cost effective health intervention that enhances quality of life, independence, and the ability to age in place.

The Governor's Housing Summit of January 2016 asked each focus group to identify low-cost and no-cost options to address Alaska's housing challenges. The Senior Housing workgroup identified 7 solutions to initiate these efforts. Highlights of the work accomplished this year include:

- **Support Goals, Strategic Objectives, and Performance Measures in the *Alaska State Plan for Senior Services, FY2016-FY2019* and the *Alaska Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Roadmap*.** Implementation of strategies to promote aging in place was recently reported for both of these state plan documents.
 - AHFC's Senior Housing Office conducted 12 community education events to improve awareness about renovation loan options to make accessibility modifications to improve outcomes for aging in place and upgrade an aging housing stock. AHFC's renovation loan activity has increased by 366% since 2014.
 - Division of Senior and Disabilities Services is exploring use of a “cash and counseling” method for Medicaid recipients in which recipients may choose to use funds to pay for environmental modifications such as building ramps and other home renovations in order to improve accessibility.
 - Senior advocates were successful in restoring funding for AHFC's Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund, thanks to the investment by the Rasmuson Foundation that was matched with state funds. This Fund is used to provide gap funding for construction and renovation of housing for seniors. (Alaska Commission on Aging, Alaska Association of Housing Authorities, AgeNET, and other partners)
 - Fifty-three HomeMAP assessments were completed in FY2016 to identify ways to improve home accessibility for seniors with physical and cognitive impairments. Funding to make those

improvements are made possible by the Department of Health and Social Services Home Modification grants and other funding sources. (Department of Health and Social Services Facilities Section and the State Independent Living Centers)

- A workgroup was established to identify low-tech and high-tech assistive and smart home technologies as a means to promote greater independence for seniors and individuals with disabilities in order to bring down the cost of long-term care and to assist with the implementation of SB 74. (Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Alaska Commission on Aging, Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, and other partners)
- **Pilot a roommate finder service for seniors.** Two regions are looking at ways to implement this option.
- **Advocate for sunrise legislation for the Alaska Commission on Aging.** Senator Stoltze (SB 124) and Representative Hawker (HB 226) sponsored companion legislation. This effort was successful with passage of SB 124.

As Alaska's population is aging, so is our housing stock. These two realities are intricately tied to the health and well-being of Alaska's senior population. When stairs become impossible, bathrooms inaccessible, and memory problems compromise personal safety, the need to transition into more expensive long-term care settings intensifies and increases burden on the senior, their family, the community, and public funds. The health care community can assist by asking their senior patients about their living conditions, the accessibility of their homes, and by referring patients to local Aging and Disabilities Resource Centers or senior service providers to assist with the identification of resources and services to assist with their goal of remaining in their home to delay the need for more costly institutional and premature placement. Senior Advocates encourage medical providers to start the conversation for patients of all ages about where the patient might be living and to consider looking at their current home to determine whether it is a place they can age successfully. (Senior advocates have a difficult time reaching this audience and could use as much help as possible to help spread the word.)

Successful aging in place initiatives require greater coordination between housing services, transportation, and health care that begins at the local level. Focusing on ways to promote positive health outcomes, providing access to appropriate home and community-based supports, providing opportunities for meaningful social engagement, and improving the accessibility of existing housing stock will improve the livability of our communities for Alaskans of all ages.