

Long Term Care Restructuring Initiatives in Alaska

Offering a Greater Array of Home & Community Based Services (HCBS):

- With the financial assistance of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Coming Home Grant, the state created the Assisted Living Development Program to develop affordable assisted living facilities in the rural areas of the state. As of April 2006, five affordable assisted living facilities that provide apartment-style housing, together with supportive services to older residents, (at least 25 percent of whom are financially eligible for Medicaid) have been completed in the rural areas of Alaska.
- Alaska's Nursing Facility Transition Program (originally called the Real Choice Systems Change Grant) helps with care coordination to enable seniors and disabled citizens to return to independent or family living from nursing homes.
 - The program is designed to give low-income seniors more choice and flexibility in obtaining services to receive home and community based services that enable them to continue to live in the community. The grant funds will be used to reach individuals before they have exhausted all their assets and qualify for nursing home placement under Medicaid. With the assistance of a support counselor, consumers will have the option of using their budget to purchase assistive devices or to make home modifications to help them live independently. The state has created the Support Options program in order to carry out these goals.
 - First, an individual must qualify for the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver Program. After the HCBS waiver is approved and the grant is disbursed, Medicaid pays any additional expenses that may remain.
 - In order to be approved for the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver Programs serving Older Alaskans an individual must be:
 - 65 years old or older,
 - Eligible for care provided in a nursing home, but chooses instead to receive services in his home and community,
 - Assessed by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. The medical diagnoses, conditions, limitations and proficiency of his ADL/IADL (Activities of Daily Living/ Instrumental Activities of Daily Living) will be evaluated to determine the individual's eligibility for the HCBS waiver program, and

- Earning a low-income as determined by the Division of Public Assistance.
- The program provides funding for one-time expenses such as:
 - Home or environmental modifications,
 - Travel,
 - Room and board to bring caregivers in from a rural community to receive training,
 - Security deposits,
 - Initial cleaning of a home, and
 - Other needed items or services approved by program coordinators.

Future Goals

Alaska's future goals for its assisted living and independent care services focus on coordination between the government, private entities, and community organizations. It will use resident surveys in order to offer programs that are more in tune with the needs of the resident. Among the goals:

- Support communities and regional organizations in creating “elder-ready communities” in preparation for the increased senior population in the next 25 years. This goal may include:
 - Upgrading neighborhoods and senior center housing, and
 - Upgrading the transportation and service infrastructure as well as service workforce development.
- Develop a “gap analysis” for health care, long term care and other senior services, to identify those communities and regions lacking access to specific segments of the continuum of care, and work with other agencies as well as consumers and advocates to identify acceptable solutions to these gaps.
- Support neighborhood and community programs to help identify seniors in need of services or a health care intervention.
- Support and encourage professionals within the building and real estate industries to pursue and obtain professional designations providing them with specialized knowledge of the unique housing needs of older Alaskans statewide. Educate developers about the value of and promote public awareness of Universal Design Principles.

Evaluation of Alaska's Nursing Facility Transition Program

Although the program has helped 154 seniors move from nursing facilities to the community in the past four years, it, as well as other waiver programs, has recently been put on hold after an investigation. CMS staff performed a focused review during week of May 4, 2009 of documents and evidence submitted by Alaska which covers the years 2006 through April of 2009. The review was conducted in response to information produced by the state and submitted to the CMS Regional Office. The information concerned delays in approximately 2,000 assessments and re-assessments for individuals eligible for the HCBS waivers and several lawsuits against Alaska related to the Personal Care Services program. The review revealed that there was "insufficient evidence to assure CMS that Alaska is operating the HCBS waivers and providing State plan PCS [personal care services] in ways which ensure the safety of the waiver and other program participants." In order for CMS to consider renewal of Alaska's four HCBS waivers prior to their expiration in June 2011, the State must demonstrate substantial improvement in the administration and operation of these waivers. Alaska has temporarily stopped accepting new admissions and enrollments into its waiver programs.

Resources

Alaska Commission on Aging State Plan for Senior Services FY 2008-FY 2011:
http://www.hss.state.ak.us/acoa/documents/statePlanFinalFY08_FY11.pdf.

The Center for Universal Design: North Carolina State University College of Design:
<http://design.ncsu.edu/cud/index.htm>.

State of Alaska Health and Human Services:
http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dsds/rural/Waiver_Eligibility.pdf.

State Perspectives on Emerging Medicaid Long-Term Care Policies and Practices.
National Association of State Medicaid Directors. An affiliate of the American Public Human Services Association. October, 2007.