

Alaska Commission on Aging

September 2025 Quarterly Meeting Summary Draft

Date: September 25, 2025 | **Format:** Virtual (Zoom) | **Chair:** Bob Sivertsen

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alaska Commission on Aging held its September 2025 quarterly meeting with strong attendance from commissioners, staff, and statewide partners. Major accomplishments included the highly successful Centenarians Day celebration, significant growth in digital outreach (1,690 e-blast subscribers), educational webinars reaching over 100 participants, productive rural Alaska site visits, and secured funding for the 2026 Senior Summit (\$5,000).

The meeting addressed critical workforce challenges, budget updates, travel freeze impacts, and strategic planning for Alaska's rapidly aging population.

I. ADMINISTRATIVE & LEADERSHIP REPORTS

Meeting Opening & Agenda

- Roll call established quorum; agenda and May 2025 minutes approved with amendments.
- New Commissioner **Jennifer Stoehr** introduced (replacing **Jan Engan**).
- **UAA MSW Intern Angela Jackson** welcomed (serving through May 2026).

Chair's Report – Bob Sivertsen

- **Senator Sullivan Meeting:** Productive 80-minute discussion on federal “opportunity bill” impacts on Alaska. Key clarification: Alaska unaffected by Medicaid provider tax changes (only state without provider tax). Federal interest expressed in rural Alaska needs assessments and healthcare infrastructure.
- **Priority:** Emphasized critical need for a Rural Outreach Coordinator position to serve Alaska's geographically dispersed senior population.

Vice Chair's Report – Paula Pawlowski

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Extensive coordination with staff on strategic planning, future events, and legislative preparation. Regular communication maintained regarding elections, budget, and the Commission's evolving role.

Executive Director's Report – Marty Lange

Professional Development:

- 50% complete with Certified Senior Advisor training.
- Completed the State's Academy for Supervisors 101.

Major Accomplishments:

- Secured \$5,000 grant (Mental Health Trust) for 2026 Senior Summit. Grant application written by Yasmin Radbod.
- Secured \$60,000 grant (Mental Health Trust) for FY27 State Plan development.
- Developed *Road to 2050* presentation: 3,400 working-age Alaskans leaving annually; 80+ population growing from 20,000 to 46,000 by 2050.
- Launched *Alaska Wisdom and Wellness* podcast (three episodes published).
- Submitted Rural Outreach Coordinator funding request to Department of Health's solicitation for application ideas to the federal Rural Health Transformation Program.
- Established monthly budget review meetings with SDS accounting.

Partnerships:

Engaged with the Alaska Mental Health Trust, AGenet, DOT Seniors Group, Fairbanks advocacy groups, and Osceola Council on Aging (Florida), which has a comparable budget and population.

Staff:

Successfully onboarded Angela Jackson (UAA MSW intern); Larry Johnson transitioned from the MASST program to employment with Catholic Community Services.

Program Coordinator's Report – Yasmin Radbod

Digital Presence Expansion

- **Facebook:** Grew from 91 to 400+ followers.

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- **GovDelivery:** Increased from 900 to 1,690 subscribers; recent e-blasts exceeding 1,000 opens with high re-engagement (people returning to reference resources).

Educational Webinars (Highly Successful)

- **Estate Planning:** 100+ participants from seven senior centers statewide. Pro bono attorney **Chelsea Riekkola** presented on power of attorney, healthcare directives, and wills.
- **Medicaid Long-Term Care Eligibility:** Attorney **Amrit Kaur Khalsa** presented on Miller Trusts, spend-down, and waiver qualification. SDS Training Unit staff shared with care coordinators; feedback described as “exceptionally helpful” and “hugely informative.”

Rural Alaska Site Visits (Shishmaref, Unalakleet, Nome)

Travel: Conducted with Dr. Steffi Kim ([UAA ANCOR Lab](#)); funded by her grant due to the travel freeze.

Key Findings:

- **Cost Challenges:** Six rolls of toilet paper cost \$15; adult diapers extremely expensive, emphasizing the importance of the \$2,500 mini-grant program.
- **Unalakleet Assisted Living:** Beautiful 10-room facility (modeled on Galena) sitting empty for years; working toward Medicaid waiver acceptance (target 2026).
- **Norton Sound Hospital (Nome):** Expanding long-term care (10 rooms); innovative equipment (whirlpool baths, ceiling track lifts, heated towels); three tribal doctors; renewed [IHS dementia grant](#).
- **Medical Travel Barrier:** Despite direct Anchorage flights, medical patients must route through Nome for authorization which adds cost and stress.
- **Providence House (Anchorage):** Housing for 55+ houseless individuals with an Alaska Native focus; includes case managers and behavioral health services.

Falls Prevention

- Slip Simulator experience at Alaska Safety Alliance (ConocoPhillips donation).
- New falls prevention flyer distributed (high engagement).
- Both Yasmin and Marty are working closely with the DOH Injury Prevention & Surveillance Unit’s new Falls Prevention Coalition.

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Outreach Activities Since May

Participated in World Elder Abuse Day at the Anchorage Cold Weather Shelter, tabled at Disability Pride event on behalf of ACoA and SDS, exhibited at the Brain Bus event in Delta Junction, attended the ADvancing States Home and Community Based Services conference, and several additional community presentations.

Upcoming Events

Walk to End Alzheimer's, Ageism Awareness Day webinar, Social Security webinar, AFN Convention, Elders and Youth Conference, Elders Appreciation and Wills Clinic.

II. CENTENARIANS DAY CELEBRATION

Outstanding Success: Over 20 of Alaska's approximately 60 centenarians participated in the [video project celebrating National Centenarians Day](#).

Format: Interviews focused on:

1. What or whom they credit for their long life.
2. Wisdom for the next generation.

Support & Recognition:

- Long-Term Care Ombudsman's Office and Pioneer Homes provided major support.
- Governor's Office issued individual commendations and a [proclamation](#).

Media Impact:

[Alaska Public Media radio coverage](#); [Senior Voice newspaper](#) featuring monthly centenarian interviews; KNBA interview with Selawik centenarian coming soon; Marty Lange attended a family celebration held for a Juneau centenarian resident.

Future: Annual celebration planned; suggestions include a centenarian cookbook and monthly website interview series in collaboration with *Senior Voice*.

III. 2026 SENIOR SUMMIT PLANNING

Vision: A comprehensive statewide assessment of senior services, needs, and gaps to inform the next State Plan for Senior Services.

Structure:

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- Primary in-person gathering in Anchorage.
- “Watch parties” in hub communities with facilitators.
- Senior centers as ideal venues.

Rationale:

Alaska’s aging population is accelerating; workforce-age people are leaving; families are increasingly bringing aging parents to Alaska.

Funding & Partnership:

- \$5,000 secured from the Mental Health Trust; AARP confirmed as a partner.
- Seeking additional partners.

Timeline: July 2026 or later (FY27, due to Trust funding).

Committee Formation: Ad hoc committee established with Bob Sivertsen (Chair), Paula Pawlowski (lead), and Nona Safra; open to commissioners and the public.

Coordination: Will align with Alaska Training Cooperative’s Aging and Disability Summit (October 14–15) to ensure no overlap.

IV. BUDGET & FINANCIAL REPORT – Nicole Wery (SDS)

FY25 Closeout

- **Interagency Receipts (OAA):** Budgeted \$214,000; spent \$170,900 (underspent \$44,000).
- **Mental Health Trust:** Budgeted \$210,000; spent \$158,000 (underspent \$52,000).
- **Reason:** Staff vacancies during FY25.

Unspent Fund Disposition:

- OAA funds remain in SDS Title III administration or roll forward.
- MHTAAR funds return to the Trust for reallocation.
- OAA admin split: 75% federal / 25% state; grantee funding: 85% federal / 15% state.

FY26 Budget

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- Categories: Personal Services, Travel, Contractual Services, Commodities, Other Expenditures.
- Strong partnership: Monthly budget review meetings established; proactive expenditure tracking.

Travel Freeze Impact

- **Policy:** Governor instituted May 2025; all departments submitted annual plans approved by the Commissioner's Office and OMB.
- **Impact on Commission:** Travel budget reduced from ~\$32,000 to \$2,200 (MHTAAR only).
- **Out-of-state travel** requires Governor's Office approval.
- **Unanticipated travel** requires a waiver memo through the Commissioner/OMB.
- **Process:** No automatic fund transfers; spending allowed with approval if funds are available.
- **Federal Grants:** Commission lacks authority to directly receive federal grants; legislature must appropriate authority before applying.

V. SDS REPORT & RATE STUDY – Tony Newman

Department update: Budget preparation season with ongoing coordination on aging initiatives.

Long-Term Care Rate Study: Comprehensive review of provider reimbursement rates underway.

- Multiple provider types and geographic factors involved.
- Study recommendations forthcoming.
- SDS and administration will decide on adoption.
- Additional funding will require a legislative request.
- Rate changes need budget appropriation.

Commission Role: Monitor progress, prepare for advocacy, and understand access implications.

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VI. “ROAD TO 2050” WORKFORCE CRISIS

Critical Challenge:

3,400 working-age Alaskans leaving annually; 80+ population projected to grow from 20,000 (current) to 46,000 by 2050, leading to a severe caregiver shortage.

Response: Creative solutions, technology, and potential immigration policy changes are needed.

Presentation: Available for legislators, partners, and funders; referenced during Senator Sullivan meeting. Contact Marty for details: martin.lange@alaska.gov

VII. COMMITTEE UPDATES & COMPLIANCE

Discovery: All committees should meet quarterly per bylaws (previously not implemented).

Committees: Bylaws, Legislative, Planning, Nominating, Older Alaskans.

Action: Meetings scheduled to ensure compliance; Executive Committee focused on strategic planning.

VIII. PARTNER ORGANIZATION REPORTS

Alaska Long-Term Care Ombudsman’s Office

Stephanie Wheeler provided an update on the office’s activities for the fiscal year. She reported that the office has opened 246 cases, with common complaints related to quality of care, medication management, food quality, and discharge/eviction notices. Wheeler noted that while staff facility visits are slightly down pending the approval of a new hire, the volunteer program has increased its number of facility visits compared to the previous year.

Key upcoming activities for the office include a series of in-person presentations for Residents’ Rights Month, completion of annual reports, and a strategic planning session scheduled for November.

If you’re interested in learning more about volunteering at AKOLTCO, visit their website: <https://akoltco.org/volunteer/>

National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition

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[Jim LaBelle](#) presented on the history of the federal boarding school system. He outlined the system's stated policy of assimilation and its impact on Native children, including the suppression of Indigenous languages.

Mr. LaBelle also detailed the current status of the **Truth and Healing Commission Bill** in Congress, explaining its provisions for establishing healing centers and funding language revitalization programs.

You can learn more about the Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition here: <https://boardingschoolhealing.org/>

Alaska Statewide Fall Prevention Coalition

Daniel Schramm and **Carie Eastaugh** reported that falls are the leading cause of injury for older Alaskans, resulting in 57 deaths and nearly 800 hospitalizations in 2024.

The coalition, funded by a grant from the **National Council on Aging**, was established to create a coordinated, statewide response to this public health issue. Its primary goals are to strengthen collaboration among community, tribal, and healthcare partners; raise awareness; and support the expansion of effective, evidence-based programs.

The presentation concluded by sharing new resources, including an Alaska-specific fall prevention brochure, a home safety checklist, and an interactive online planning tool for individuals and caregivers. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Want to get involved? Contact Daniel at daniel.schramm@alaska.gov

Mature Alaskans Seeking Skills Training (MASST)

Rita Gray provided an update on the [MASST program](#), a community service and job training program for older adults. She reported that in the past year, the program assisted 115 individuals, of whom 70% have disabilities, 43% are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and 89% are living below the poverty line.

Ms. Gray concluded with a request for assistance in connecting older workers with job opportunities, noting that the program has openings statewide and provides participants with paid training at \$15 per hour for 20 hours a week.

At the same time, **Kate Duder**, Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, presented on the importance of older workers, reading a proclamation from the governor

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designating September 21–27, 2025, as [Employ Older Workers Week](#), highlighting the value and contributions of seniors in the workforce.

Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA)

Kelda Barstad gave an update on the [Trust's](#) budget and grant-making processes. She noted that the Trust's Board of Trustees recently approved the FY27 budget, which includes \$205,000 for staffing and support for the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA), as well as funding for the next revision of the Alaska State Plan for Senior Services.

The stakeholder engagement process for the FY28–29 budget cycle is scheduled to begin in early 2026.

Ms. Barstad also announced significant changes to the Trust's grant-making process for non-state entities. The Trust has moved to a quarterly application cycle, and the initial letter of interest has been eliminated in favor of a direct, full application. All grant awards are now approved by the Board of Trustees. The next application deadline is **November 15**, with decisions expected in **mid-February 2026**.

SDS Grants Unit

Erik Peterson provided an update on the division's grant programs. He announced that the \$1.5 million increase for community-based grants is currently being processed. Grant amendments reflecting this increase are expected to be sent to providers within one to two weeks.

Mr. Peterson also reported that a competitive **Request for Proposals (RFP)** for the *Mental Health Essential Equipment Grant* will be released in mid-to-late October. This capital grant will support one-time equipment purchases for agencies serving Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries.

Finally, he noted that SDS is actively recruiting to fill a vacant position that will manage the division's capital grant programs.

In the subsequent discussion, Mr. Peterson acknowledged that there is a gap between the needs of grant applicants and the funding available, particularly in efforts to expand services to unserved regions like western and northern Alaska. He stated that while providers are often conservative in their funding requests, they consistently report that

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rising costs and increased demand make it challenging to maintain service levels with current grant amounts.

Adult Suicide Prevention Policy Academy (Hosted by SAMHSA)

Yasmin Radbod, Tony Newman, and Lorraine Thomas reported on their attendance at the conference, held for the five states with the highest rates of suicide among older adults. The goal of the academy was to help states enhance their suicide prevention plans to better address this population.

A central theme of the presentation was the critical need for accurate, Alaska-specific data. The delegation learned that current state reports use crude rates based on the entire U.S. population, which does not accurately reflect Alaska's situation.

The team's primary short-term action item is to work with **Health Analytics and Vital Records (HAVERS)** to obtain precise data on the prevalence, trends, and demographics of older adult suicide within the state.

Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC)

Jim McCall presented an update on the corporation's activities. He announced that [AHFC](#) is conducting a new statewide housing assessment, which will include a specific sub-report on housing for seniors and persons with disabilities. The report, expected in early 2026, will focus on accessibility and modification needs.

Mr. McCall reported that as of September 1, 2025, there were **1,678 seniors** on the waitlist for public housing—an increase of 50 from the previous year. He also noted the high demand for the **Housing Choice Voucher** program in Anchorage, which received 4,400 applications during a 30-day opening in April.

Updates on public housing facilities for seniors include completed or ongoing projects in several communities, such as boiler repairs in Anchorage, a new roof in Fairbanks, and window replacements in Juneau. AHFC is also involved in new development projects, including a 16-bed assisted living facility in Anchorage and six units of housing in Homer.

Finally, Mr. McCall mentioned that discussions have begun regarding the potential transition of some combined "Senior Disabled" public housing facilities to "Senior Housing Only."

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SDS Training Unit

Kara Thrasher-Livingston delivered a comprehensive overview of Alaska's long-term services and supports system. The presentation focused on Medicaid-funded programs that allow individuals to receive care in their homes and communities rather than in institutional settings.

She explained that **Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS)** “waive” the requirement for an individual to reside in a facility to receive care. Alaska operates five distinct waiver programs targeted to specific populations:

- Two for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)
- One for adults with physical and developmental disabilities (APDD)
- One for Alaskans Living Independently (ALI)
- One for children with complex medical conditions (CCMC)

Eligibility requires Medicaid coverage and meeting a specific “level of care,” meaning a degree of support equivalent to that provided in a nursing home or intermediate care facility.

The presentation also covered **Community First Choice (CFC)**, a state plan option providing personal care and other supports.

Alaska Training Cooperative at the UAA Center for Human Development

Lisa Cauble provided an overview of her organization's work and detailed a new statewide dementia training initiative. The Cooperative, funded primarily by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, focuses on providing training and career development opportunities for direct service workers supporting Trust beneficiaries.

She highlighted several key training programs, including:

- Alaska Core Competencies for Direct Care Workers
- Positive Approach to Care for dementia
- Mental Health First Aid for Older Adults
- Basic Concepts of Care Coordination

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The main focus was the new **Alaska Statewide Dementia Training Project** for FY26—a collaborative effort with SDS and Alzheimer’s Resource of Alaska.

View all of AKTC’s upcoming events at their Box link:

<https://chd.app.box.com/s/de1ed1fj45rud9mqxn2fxa2ezx87li51>

Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)

Ariel Berg provided an update explaining that the six regional ADRCs connect older Alaskans, individuals with disabilities, and their families to long-term services and supports.

Ms. Berg reported that for the FY26 grant cycle, all six existing ADRCs were re-awarded their grants following a competitive solicitation. The presentation also included an introduction from **Elizabeth Clark**, the new Division Manager for Aging and Disabilities at the Bristol Bay Native Association, one of the regional ADRC sites.

ACLU: Alaska Prison Project Director

Megan Edge was unable to join us but you can learn more about her work regarding seniors in Alaskan prisons [here](#). Contact: MEdge@acluak.org

IX. KEY PROJECTS & INITIATIVES

- **Alaska Wisdom and Wellness Podcast:** Official launch (wisdom.alaska.gov), three episodes published; bi-monthly schedule; upcoming episode on falls prevention with three expert perspectives.
- **Statewide Senior Services Summary Update:** Led by Angela Jackson and her supervisor Yasmin Radbod; comprehensive documentation of services and gaps; partner data collection underway.
- **Technology & Connectivity:** Rural internet critical for healthcare delivery; most visited communities have strong smartphone access, but service interruptions severely impact clinics and coordination.
- **Mini-Grant Program:** \$2,500 annual grants through the Trust and Alzheimer’s Resource of Alaska; critical for rural areas with high costs and low awareness in outlying communities.

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X. ACTION ITEMS

Short-Term (Next 3 Months)

- Establish Summit planning committee.
- Coordinate with Alaska Training Cooperative on existing summit.
- Record and publish falls prevention podcast.
- Conduct Ageism Awareness webinar (October).
- Conduct [Social Security webinar](#).
- Host Elders Appreciation and Wills Clinic at AFN Convention.
- Set ACoA legislative priorities in collaboration with AGENet and AARP.

Medium-Term (3–6 Months)

- Develop comprehensive Summit plan and budget.
- Identify additional Summit partners and funding.
- Complete Statewide Senior Services Summary update (by May 2026).

Long-Term (6–12 Months+)

- Execute 2026 Senior Summit (July 2026+).
- Begin State Plan for Senior Services (FFY27–31).
- Advocate for Rural Outreach Coordinator funding.
- Present *Road to 2050* to stakeholders.
- Increase mini-grant awareness in rural Alaska.

Next Quarterly Meeting: December 2, 2025

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