

December 2020

To Members of the 32nd Alaska Legislature:

Our direct support workforce is on the brink.



Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) work directly with individuals with disabilities, helping with eating, bathing, and transporting. They provide job coaching, mental health support, help with navigating systems, participating in social activities, and more.

The systems of support for Alaskans with disabilities are stretched precariously thin. While the current pandemic demonstrates the essential nature of home and community based services for people with disabilities, these services can only be provided if there is a workforce to provide them. As advocates for services to children, adults and elders with disabilities, we urge you to protect the direct support workforce that delivers essential care to over 40,000 Alaskans every day. This includes people who need daily support related to disabilities due to aging, mental illness, injury or developmental disabilities.

These daily critical services are primarily funded through Medicaid, with a combination of federal and state funding. Reduced reimbursement rates will worsen an incredibly fragile system. Reductions *will* result in increased costs to the state because people will be forced into nursing homes and hospitals where the cost of care is at least doubled.

Medicaid allows people with disabilities and elders with age-related disabilities to live in their own home or with a small group instead of in a much more expensive nursing home or long-term care facility. It may enable parents of medically fragile children to work while continuing to parent their children, instead of resorting to an out-of-home placement. Additional important considerations:

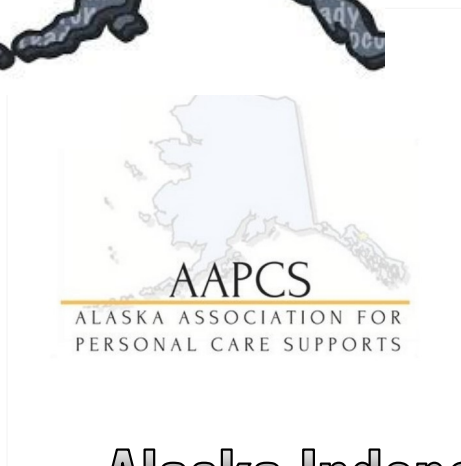
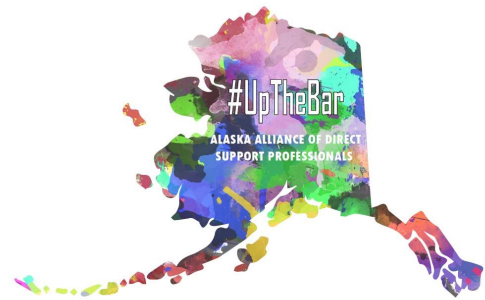
- ⇒ Any service that the state provides in an institution should also be made available to individuals in a less expensive and better-quality home and community-based system. *Olmstead v. L.C., 527 U.S. 581, 587 (1999)*
- ⇒ Average annual cost per person who qualifies for these supports is \$87,718, compared to \$171,904 in nursing homes, \$214,423 in out-of-state institutions and \$531,312 at the Alaska Psychiatric Institute. *Note: Institutional costs increased 20% FY18 to FY19, while community services increased minimally.*
- ⇒ With COVID – community-based services are saving the lives of Alaskans who would otherwise live in larger congregate settings as well as keeping them out of the hospital.

Currently Direct Support Professionals are working in high-risk settings for inadequate compensation, often without healthcare coverage for themselves. Only 36% of the Alaskan employers provide health insurance, compared to 70% nationally. Almost 99% of the funding for these services comes from state and federal Medicaid dollars, which providers cannot negotiate. Unlike some other federal programs, the rates are fixed.

During the 2018 legislative session, SB174—Alaska’s Shared Vision—was passed. The Vision, which is now embedded in Alaska Statute 47.80.130(a)(7), describes how services should be provided to Alaskans with disabilities: allowing “each person to participate effectively, with assistance based on the person’s strengths and abilities, in managing the person’s support services so that the person can achieve a meaningful life in their job, in their home and in the community.”

This cannot be achieved without a workforce.

We, the undersigned, stand in support of this workforce that is so at-risk. Please keep Direct Support Professionals, and the economic segment they represent, in mind as you make critical, life-changing decisions this session. Advocates will be sharing specific ways to support the workforce during the upcoming legislative session.



AGENET

Alaska Independent Living Network



For key contacts, see Page 3

Key Contacts for Further Information

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