

3. Employment: Issue #1

Alaskans with disabilities and Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries are experiencing significant difficulties with a shortage of direct support staff to help them carry out the basic functions of every day life. The primary reasons for this difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff and staff turn-over are salary and benefits.

Direct support staff earns \$11 to \$13 per hour. A recent housing study states quite dramatically that in order to be able to afford a two bedroom apartment in Anchorage, salaries would need to be increased to \$17.71 per hour. (Alaska Housing Trust)

In addition, many agencies have reduced or eliminated components of their benefit package as a substantial number of Direct Support Professionals are forced to seek a second job in order to live day to day.

1. Would you endorse funding a “living wage” in order to provide necessary services for Alaskans who are in need of support, and, if yes, how would you propose to fund this increase?

4. Employment: Issue #2

Many of the direct support staff whom agencies are currently able to hire have no training or skill set competencies. In order to maximize desired outcomes and goals for individuals who experience disabilities, we need to have quality standards with licensed and credentialed direct care staff. This certification would also offer individualized opportunities for advancement and promotion, while fostering longevity in the profession.

1. Would you support licensure and credentialing for direct support staff in order to have a higher level of skill training and competencies to serve Alaskans experiencing disabilities and Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries? If yes, how would you accomplish this?

5. Housing: Issue #1

Affordable, safe and accessible housing is a vital issue for many Alaskans, but for Alaska Mental Health Trust beneficiaries and individuals experiencing disabilities, this issue is even more critical. Results from best practices show us that if individuals have their basic housing needs met, they are able to focus on other domains (i.e. jobs, recovery, etc). Far too many who have the least amount of resources are forced to struggle with securing affordable and accessible housing.

1. Would you be supportive of an Alaska Housing Trust to address gaps and problems existing in our low income housing system?

6. Healthcare: Issue #1

Alaska has seen a general shift from community grant based funding to a more medical model using Medicaid funds. Community grant funding (which allows for a more prevention and intervention service model) has experienced significant budget reductions. Reductions in community grants have created a more costly crisis driven system with not only increased financial costs for medical service, but a cost to our quality of life including wellness and job productivity. A recent study by the Department of Corrections for the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority has shown that as many as 50% of Alaskans in our correction system experience a mental illness, substance addiction or disability. If these individuals were able to access community grant prevention/intervention services early, when needed, many of these incarcerations could have been avoided and recidivism reduced.

1. Would you support an increase to community grant funding?

7. Healthcare: Issue #2

Alaska state statute requires a periodic rate review for all hospitals and nursing homes (our most restrictive and costly care system). No mechanism now exists for a periodic review to adjust rates for our least restrictive and most cost effective community-based care system. This lack of regular periodic rate review of Medicaid and grants rates has compromised the community-based system's ability to maintain the same level of service.

1. Would you actively support a periodic rate review process to regularly review and adjust rates for community-based services?

8. Healthcare: Issue #3

It is becoming more and more difficult for Alaskans with disabilities and Trust beneficiaries to access primary health care because of a unwillingness of physicians to accept the reimbursement rates provided by Medicaid and Medicare. This lack of physician access through scheduled doctor's visits with their primary physician has led many individuals to access care through the much more costly emergency room care.

1. Would you support additional incentives to increase the accessibility of primary health care for individuals with disabilities and Trust beneficiaries?

9. Healthcare: Issue #4

Many Alaskans experience traumatic brain injuries which impact their ability to perform daily life skill functions without some additional supports. This includes over 10,000 plus returning Alaskan service members. Our Alaskan service system does not include federal Medicaid waiver to help fund these needed supports.

1. Would you support the creation of a federal Medicaid waiver for individuals who experience a traumatic brain injury?

10. Healthcare: Issue #5

Alaska has the second highest growth rate of seniors (60 and older) in the U.S. Many of these seniors may at some point need additional services above what the family alone is able to provide. A number of individuals needing services (such as respite care, care coordination, home delivered meals, homemaker or chore assistance, transportation, etc) will not qualify for Alaska's senior Medicaid waiver due to restrictive eligibility requirements. These seniors must rely on grant-funded services, paid for by federal Older Americans Act funds supplemented with state general funds which provide services based on the availability of grant resources.

After a decade of flat funding, the 2008 Legislature added an increment to senior community-based grant funding. However, as the number of seniors and costs continue to rise, we will need additional increases to the community-based grant funded programs. Investments in grant funding help keep many seniors at home longer and avoid the higher cost of nursing home care.

1. Will you support added funding for senior community-based grants as Alaska's senior population and costs increase?