

# State can't fund Native health care; cutoff would be 'serious'

The Associated Press

Juneau — The state does not have the financial resources to fund the entire federal Alaska Native health care system, and a major cut in federal dollars for the service would have "serious consequences" for Natives, a legislative report says.

The report said state officials should draft a formal policy outlining the state's public health care responsibilities, coordinate state and federal efforts to provide health services to Natives and expand the state's preventive care system.

More importantly, Rep. Thelma Buchholdt, D-Anchorage and director of the legislative study, said "we must make it clear to Reagan that we will not accept his new federalism trade-off of more state autonomy for crushing financial burdens."

Congress has proposed cutting about \$8 million from last year's Alaska Native health care operating budget of \$96 million, the report said.

Legislative aides predicted the deepest cuts would be in funding for preventive health care. Also, residents living in outlying areas would have less money to travel to centrally located health care facilities, and physicians would have to cut back on visits to patients living in remote areas.

The \$86,000 report for the House Finance Committee was released Wednesday.

"Any major reduction in congressional appropriations for the Native health care

system would have serious consequences for Alaska Natives and the state as a whole. Great stress would be put on other medical facilities as village residents would be forced to seek medical care away from their villages," the report said.

State and local health care facilities would be burdened by increased work loads, and the survival of many villages would be threatened, the 280-page study said.

Lack of coordination between the state and federal governments and poorly defined responsibilities were listed in the report as the primary obstacles to providing adequate health care to Natives.

Additionally, insufficient contract care funding, lack of facilities and inadequate mental health and alcoholism programs are problems, the report said.

Indian Health Services provides medical care to residents of more than 200 Alaska communities and funds a hospital in Anchorage.

It is important to maintain a solid health care system because "much of the change and progress seen in the rural areas of Alaska during the last two decades was made possible by a system designed to bring health care to people where they lived," the report said.

A committee of state and local health officials advised Buchholdt and her staff on the report. Interviews were conducted with administrators, professionals, workers and

board members of the Native health care system.