

The Issues: Findings from earlier studies

1972 Alaska Comprehensive Study on Aging

* In almost all ways that economic well-being can be measured (income, wealth, and labor force activity) the economic status of the natives is significantly below that of the rest of the Alaskan elderly.

* There is a steady decline in the economic status of Alaska's elderly as their age increases.

* More than one-third of Alaska's elderly population appear to have no knowledge of where to obtain information on income and employment programs. This suggests a need for improved dissemination of information to assist the elderly in improving their economic status.

* One-fifth or 900 of the living units presently occupied by the Alaskan elderly

are estimated to be substandard.

* The vast majority of Alaska's elderly express no desire to live in nursing or retirement homes and even fewer desire any assistance in gaining admission to them. This strongly suggests that, if the desires of the elderly are to be taken into account, the enlargement of nursing home and retirement facilities as usually conceived are not necessarily a viable long range solution for the needs of all the elderly.

* Almost one-third of all elderly Alaskans and nearly 60% of the native elderly feel the need for some assistance in getting better medical and dental care.

1973 Steiner Report: Pioneers' Homes

* The future development of facilities, programs and services by the Alaska Pioneers' Homes must be closely interrelated to the total provision of such services for all aged citizens of Alaska.

* Although the concept of the Pioneers' Homes function is that of providing residences for pioneers, the actual function is or is rapidly becoming that of providing skilled nursing care and intermediate care to the guests.

* The state should initiate further study to develop the most appropriate means to provide as many of these related care services (homemaker, home health aide, home health care, meals-on-wheels, etc.) as possible to aged Alaskans throughout the state.

* In areas where other acceptable

facilities and programs for the aging are available, the Pioneers' Home should consider purchasing such services, especially skilled nursing and not operate duplicate services.

* A Pioneers' Home in Anchorage should be an ambulatory and intermediate care home with skilled nursing home care provided by the private sector. Private nursing homes and the medical community will support this.

* The state should clarify the statutory and regulatory authority for the Alaska Pioneers' Homes and should consider the creation of a single regulatory, coordinating agency to supervise, establish and maintain standards of construction, operation and funding support for services to all aged Alaskans.

1976 State Policy Workshop on Aging

* The state should formulate a policy which will encourage and implement health care programs for the elderly other than Pioneers' Homes, hospitals, and nursing homes and addressing the concepts of:

- 1) swing beds;
- 2) extended physician care;
- 3) medical aides;

- 4) homemakers;
- 5) home helpers;
- 6) subsidized home care on medical and financial need;
- 7) financial need;
- 8) foster homes;
- 9) day care;
- 10) congregate living; and
- 11) protected residential.

1976 Jim Stey Report: Aging Programs

* As people grow older, they experience a marked decline in their personal wealth and state of health.

* During this retirement period the average individual struggles to protect the erosion of his personal resources, his health, and his respected role in the community.

* The studies invariably conclude that elderly people are most concerned about their economic status, general health, and

personal independence. Hence, the primary purpose of federal and state assistance and reward programs is to help elderly people; (1) maintain a favorable standard of living, (2) protect and enhance their health, (3) increase their personal and social mobility.

* The state might examine the feasibility of uniting all state aging programs into one separate division within a department.

1979 HEW Audit of the Alaska Office on Aging

* The Governor's Advisory Committee has taken a passive role in the development of Aging Programs in Alaska.

* The Office on Aging needed to put more effort into developing a comprehensive and coordinated system for the delivery of services to elders as well as providing for increased advocacy of Aging Programs.

* We recommend that a reassessment of the direction of Aging Programs in Alaska

be conducted with the goal of developing a comprehensive system of delivering services to elders in Alaska.

* We recognize that the State of Alaska has several programs providing services to elders; however, coordination of these programs is necessary to eliminate overlaps and/or gaps in services being provided to elders, prevent waste of State and Federal funds, and make Aging Programs more effective.

1971 State White House Conference on Aging

* We recommend an advocacy program so that the elderly will be assisted by spokesmen and aides to ensure their needs are met. The elderly need representatives to educate legislators about their needs.

* The elderly should not be unnecessarily isolated in a hospital just because they are old or have no place to go. Home health aides and other paraprofessionals can play a useful role.

* People must be as independent as possible. Impairments are what make old age miserable; every effort should be made to prevent them or, if they occur, to correct them or restrain those who can benefit from this.

* The most important (health) action needed now for older people in order of priority:

1) Include dentures, glasses, hearing aids and prescription drugs in Medicare program.

2) Necessary services to help older people to remain in home, if desired and desirable.

3) More complete medical services available to all people.

4) Increased training for helping older people with health problems.

5) More nursing home facilities, especially in outlying areas, with emphasis on In and Out-of-Home care.

* Adequate housing for the elderly was voted as the most critical and urgent need of the older Alaskan by the delegates assembled at the State Conference.

* The State or Federal Government should provide for adequate housing for older Alaskans in the area in which they live. Older people should not be transplanted or moved away from family, friends, or locality in which they have lived their entire lives.

* Society should be prepared to assume responsibility for providing older persons with supportive services. The assistance of local and state governments could aid in establishing several types of care for the elderly when needed to supplement family care or total care when there is no family.

* Older residents should be included and involved in all phases of community planning and development. They should be given the opportunity to remain or become politically active. The community should provide the opportunity for elderly citizens to be doers, not just recipients of service.

* The development of a state-wide community-oriented information and referral service is an urgent need and would solve many of the questions and problems confronting the older Alaskan.

* The interpretation or misunderstanding that some people have with the welfare assistance programs is indeed unfortunate. All these programs are designed to help people who are in need, many of these people are in this situation through no fault of their own, and many times are the victims of circumstances over which they have no control. Present day inflation is one of these evils. Public assistance is a tax funded program and provides the only avenue through which many people, as tax payers, can assist their fellow man. This type of assistance should not be considered a disgrace or dishonor. Sub-

sidizing a person in need is no different than subsidizing an airline.

Did you know?

* At the turn of the century, only four percent or three million people were over the age of 65. Today it's 11 percent or 24 million people; another eight-nine million are between 60-65. Within 50 years one of every five Americans will be over 65. If you are older than 15, and alive then, you will be one of them.

* The 1970 U.S. census reported 106,441 centenarians. Alaska reported 88 persons over 100 years old.

* The elderly, on the average, see a doctor 50 percent more often than younger people, have twice as many hospital stays and have per capita health costs four times that of people under 65.

* Health costs for the elderly have increased more than 500 percent since 1965.

* When the Alaska Longevity Bonus program began in 1973, there were 3,641 recipients. There are twice as many recipients today and the number will double again by the year 2005.

* Only five percent of people over the age of 65 reside in nursing homes nationwide.

* Most elderly poor have become poor after becoming old.

* They greying of what was once known as the baby boom will begin in 2006 when persons born in 1946 begin turning 60. We're more than half way there.

Every day a thousand people turn 65 in America.

* According to Claude Pepper, chairman of the U.S. House Select Committee on Aging, every dollar spent on congregate senior housing results in a 50 cents saving in federal nursing home expenditures.

* Some 35 million people receive benefits from Social Security — that's one in every seven Americans.

* Eighty-one percent of people over the age of 65 are fully ambulatory.

* In 1980 it is estimated that the average man will spend 14 years in retirement. By the year 2000, average retirement may be as long as 25 years.

* Dollars saved by a person who retired in 1967 are worth less than 35 cents today.

* Life expectancy in 1900 was 47. Today it is 69 for men and 77 for women.

* In the 1976 presidential elections 62 percent of the elderly voted.

This report was designed, written and produced by Jim Kelly, Administrative Assistant to Sen. Pat Rodey. It was paid for by the State Committee on Services to the Elderly.