

Health cutbacks hit ASRAA

by Alexandra J. McClanahan

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The recent decision by the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage to cut back on payment of travel funds for Alaska Natives who use ANMC could have a severe impact on the Association for Stranded Rural Alaskans in Anchorage.

Mary Wolcuff, executive director of ASRAA, cautioned rural Alaskans that her agency's funds are extremely limited and will run out months before expected if the demand for assistance continues.

"If we're hit like we have been the last couple of days, we won't be able to pay for the rest of the year," Wolcuff said.

Wolcuff said ASRAA can assist rural Alaskans with shelter costs and even travel payments in some cases, but she stressed that cutbacks in state funding in recent years have reduced ASRAA's ability to help.

She said the problem is that people who had medical treatments scheduled before ANMC officials made the deci-

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sion to cut back on payments may not realize that their way home will not be paid.

For example, she said one man came to Anchorage to have a cyst removed and assumed that the Indian Health Service would pay his way home. That is not longer possible because ANMC is facing a shortage of at least \$1 million for this fiscal year, according to Dr. Richard Mand-sager, ANMC director.

For now, travel funds will be paid only for emergency and pre-natal medical services.

The situation concerns her, Wolcuff said, because once the word gets out, people will probably put off medical treatments that are needed.

"How do you assess a situation from the village?" she asked. "Do they have to wait until it's a total emergency?"

Depending on how long the situation continues, Wolcuff said it could become a drain on Anchorage's social service agency budgets.

Wolcuff urged anyone who has questions or concerns to contact her at ASRAA in Anchorage, 277-7043.