

# Alaska Health Care Strategies Planning Council

## **Final Report: Summary and Recommendations**

*Making Alaskans the healthiest people in  
the nation...*

December 23, 2007

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### **Executive Summary**

On February 15, 2007, Governor Sarah Palin issued Administrative Order #232 establishing the Alaska Health Care Strategies Planning Council in the Office of the Governor. The purpose of the Council was to build the foundation for developing a statewide plan to identify both short-term and long-term strategies that effectively address issues related to access, cost and quality of health care for Alaskans. Members of the Council, all appointed by Governor Palin, are listed in Appendix C.

The Council interpreted its charge from Governor Palin broadly, to focus on the overall goal of improving the health of Alaskans. Within that broad charge, the Council considered health care to be an important component in improving the health of Alaskans. According to the Council, health care is a broadly defined term, relating to the prevention, treatment and management of illness, preserving mental, behavioral, physical health, and dealing with chemical dependency.

In accordance with the order, the Council reviewed and synthesized the extensive body of existing research on the subject, agreed upon the most salient facts, and identified the most significant health care issues in the state. Based on seven overarching healthcare challenges identified by the Council, members articulated the following seven comprehensive health care policy goals:

- *Personal responsibility and prevention in health care will be top priorities for government, the private sector, tribal entities, communities, families, and individuals;*
- *Health care costs for all Alaskans will consistently be below the national average;*
- *Alaska will have a sustainable health care workforce;*
- *All Alaskan communities will have access to clean and safe water and wastewater systems;*
- *Quality health care will be accessible to all Alaskans to meet their health care needs;*
- *Develop and foster the statewide leadership necessary to support a comprehensive statewide health care policy;*
- *Increase the number of Alaskans covered by health insurance and encourage employers to offer a range of health insurance options.*

Because of its short time frame, the Council was unable to address the Administrative Order's directive to present fiscal information to accompany each of the short- and long-term strategies. Unfortunately, with only 24 hours of face-to-face meeting time, identifying the fiscal impact of recommendations remains unaddressed, and must be a top priority in future consideration by this or subsequent bodies.

### **The Council's Vision and Long-term Goal**

At its inaugural meeting on June 11, 2007, Council members articulated an overall vision of health care in Alaska – that ***“Alaskans are the healthiest people in the nation.”*** This vision led to development of a concrete mission statement describing the ultimate

outcome of the Council's work: *"To develop strategies, including performance measures, to provide health care access to all Alaskans by 2014."*

#### **The "Fact-Based Process"**

The work of the Council was facilitated through a "fact-based" process by Mr. Dennis McMillian, President and CEO of The Foraker Group, an Alaskan-based nonprofit corporation. Members were asked to review existing research and initiatives, and hear from subject-matter experts on the major issues in Alaska's health care system. Only those facts garnered from existing sources and/or presented to the Council at its meetings, and which were widely recognized by Council member as salient to the process, were allowed to remain in the conversation.

While time-consuming, the fact-based process allowed the development of a solid basis for discussing the issue of health care in Alaska, highlighting the major challenges with that system, and identifying realistic solutions to address those challenges.

#### **Alaska's Health Care Challenges: A Strategic Plan for the Future**

In the opinion of the Council, there are seven challenges requiring immediate and comprehensive attention in Alaska's health care system:

- *Prevention and personal responsibility don't play big enough roles in the health and health care of Alaskans;*
- *Receiving quality health care in Alaska is expensive, well above the national average, and increasing;*
- *There are significant shortages in the health care workforce across the state;*
- *Water and wastewater systems in many rural communities lead to health problems;*
- *Quality health care is difficult to access for many Alaskans, urban and rural;*
- *There must be consistent and focused state and local leadership to improve the health of Alaskans, and build a comprehensive health care system in Alaska;*
- *Health insurance is an important if as yet misunderstood part of comprehensive health and health care.*

Based on the vision of a healthy Alaska, a one-page "Alaska Health Care Action Plan" was developed by the Council. The plan appears in the following section, and includes a combination of long-term and short-term goals. Where applicable, the short-term strategies appear at the beginning of the relevant goals.

During its work the Council was able to generate dozens of possible solutions to address the challenges, much of that the result of "brain-storming." The identified solutions are presented in Appendix A. Most require development of implementation plans, which was considered beyond the scope of the Council's work, especially given the short window for completion of its tasks. Although they are not developed fully, the articulated solutions in the plan, and within Appendix A, present a real and actionable foundation for helping to meet the goals in the "Alaska Health Care Action Plan."

**Alaska's Health Care Action Plan: "Making Alaskans the healthiest people in the nation."  
Long-Term Goals and Strategic Directions (2008 – 2014)**

***Goal One: Health costs for all Alaskans will consistently be below the national average.***

- Increase the place of consumerism in health care purchasing by giving people control over their health care dollar – the foundations are accessible, transparent, evidence-based price/quality information about providers and services (short-term)
- Create an easily accessible and constantly updated website containing evidence-based price and quality information about health care providers and services (short-term)
- Increase community-based health care services, both public and private sector
- Stabilize the costs of health care by reducing the rate of increase relative to other states (national increase is 6%, decrease Alaskan rate to 4% annual increase)

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***Goal Two: Alaska will have a sustainable health care workforce.***

- Increase WWAMI seats to 50 per year, and increase seats in UA Nursing and Nurse Practitioner programs (short-term)
- Develop policies and systems to alleviate the health care worker shortage, and prevent it from recurring
- Implement a doctoral-level nursing program at the University of Alaska to meet the 2015 deadline for Nurse Practitioner education requirements

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***Goal Three: All Alaskan communities will have clean and safe water and wastewater systems.***

- Improve adherence to the state's existing water and wastewater treatment "plan," through the Village Safe Water Program

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***Goal Four: Quality health care will be accessible to all Alaskans to meet their health care needs.***

- Expand tele-health and electronic health record systems, taking the lead in pursuing matching FCC grant funds (short-term)
- Increase presence of the public health system, particularly public health nurses, especially in rural communities (short-term)
- Increase access of Alaskans to a primary care provider and behavioral health provider when they are needed
- Decrease the likelihood that Alaskans will use emergency rooms for primary care
- Reduce the impact of existing barriers to health care accessibility by exploring private enterprise incentives
- Improve primary and long-term health care options for elders, particularly with regard to Medicaid and Medicare

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***Goal Five: Personal responsibility and prevention in health care will be top priorities for government, the private sector, tribal entities, communities, families, and individuals.***

- Decrease the impact of obesity, smoking, substance abuse and other lifestyle factors on the health of Alaskans, through intense public education with public and private partners (short-term)
- Improve the likelihood that every Alaskan will choose to live a healthy lifestyle and make healthy lifestyle choices
- Increase the place of personal responsibility in health care decision making for all Alaskans



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***Goal Six: Develop and foster the statewide leadership necessary to develop and support a comprehensive statewide health and health care policy.***

- Create an ongoing, quasi-independent, non-partisan, volunteer "Alaska Health Care Commission" in statute (short-term)
- Elevate the discussion of health care to a statewide audience

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***Goal Seven: Increase the number of Alaskans covered by health insurance***

- Raise the eligibility criteria for Denali KidCare from the current 175% to 200% of federal poverty limits (short-term)
- Reduce potential for financial impact from catastrophic loss by supporting new and innovative approaches to insurance for individuals, which would be consumer-owned, portable, and purchased with pre-tax dollars
- All Alaskans have at least a catastrophic, incentive-based insurance option (i.e., high deductible coverage)
- Encourage employers, through varied incentives, to offer a range of insurance options/choices to employees – to include at a minimum, high deductible plans

**Alaska's Health Care Challenges: Discussion and Recommendations**

The Council engaged in lengthy discussion of the seven main challenges facing Alaska's health care system, and generated the following discussion points related to each.

- *Defining the specific problem or problems*
- *Why addressing them through comprehensive state action is important*
- *What should be done about it – in other words, identifying desired outcomes*

In addition to discussing what should be done to address each problem, the Council generated possible solutions and solicited public comment on the Health Care Action Plan. A Strategic Implementation Table (Appendix A) list the many solutions generated by the Council, and sets the foundation for implementation of selected short and long-term strategies. The full text of public comment will be presented to Governor Palin under separate cover, but the overriding themes contained within those comments are summarized in Appendix B.

**Goal One: The High Cost of Health Care in Alaska**

**What's the problem?** *The costs of producing quality health care are high, and therefore it is quite expensive to be a consumer of that care. The costs of health care in Alaska are already well above the national average, and like the rest of the nation, are increasing.*

**Why this is important:** *A new approach to this problem must be embraced if there is to be long-term, positive reform in Alaska's health care system. If Alaska continues along the same path, the results will remain unchanged. Reducing the rate of increase in the costs of health care is a "must do" priority, and Alaskans need to get the best value for health care dollars spent. Every health care dollar must be spent wisely. Broadly stated, the high cost of health care is a barrier to many Alaskans getting the health care they need. The present system supports the high and increasing costs of health care and inefficient utilization of health care dollars.*

**What should be done about it:** *Decreasing the rate of growth in health care costs in Alaska will require development of a high-quality health care system that is evidence-based, consumer driven and market-responsive. With respect to lowering costs, insurance that is portable and consumer-owned plays a central role, and requires much more discussion at the state level. Overall, giving people more control over their health care dollar is a central component, as is providing appropriate, accessible, transparent, and evidence-based cost and quality information about health care providers and services. In the short-term, one of the most important goals should be state creation of an easily accessible and up-to-date website providing health care cost and quality information to Alaskans. These strategies alone are not sufficient to reduce the overall cost of health care in Alaska, nor to reduce the rate of growth. Closely related are the subjects of personal responsibility, access to health care, increasing the number of health care providers, and insurance.*

## Goal Two: The Health Care Workforce

**What's the problem?** *There are significant shortages in the health care workforce across the state. Alaska needs more health care workers throughout the system, at all levels.*

**Why this is important:** *Without ample health care workers, the system will continue to falter – it is already showing signs of strain. Lack of a sustainable health care workforce is a primary factor in the increasing costs of health care, and also in the decreasing access of health care for Alaskans. In addition, significant access issues exist in both urban and rural areas, which will likely require expansion of the health care workforce.*

**What should be done:** *Statewide policy should enable the creation of a sustainable health care workforce that alleviates the current shortage and prevents it from recurring. A good start is to “grow more of our own” within Alaska, by presenting health care professions more prominently as viable career options, with students continually encouraged to build the skills and the interests necessary to pursue health care careers. In the short-term, to increase primary care providers in the state, the number of WWAMI seats should be increased to meet the projected need of 50 per year in the next decade. In concert with that, the University of Alaska nursing doctorate degree should be implemented as well. The number of resident positions in the Family Practice Residency Program should be increased, as should the number of graduates in both the UA Nursing and Nurse Practitioner Programs.*

## Goal Three: Sustainable Rural Water and Wastewater Systems

**What's the problem:** *Water and wastewater systems in many rural communities are inadequate, unsafe, or non-existent, and can be a major cause of health problems within those communities.*

**Why this is important:** *There is a strong correlation between the health of Alaska's rural residents, and water and wastewater safety. Building and operating clean drinking water and wastewater disposal systems is one of the most effective means for improving the health and wellness of rural Alaskans and rural communities.*

**What should be done:** *There is an active state program in place to bring sustainable and safe drinking water and wastewater disposal systems to all of Alaska's rural communities – the Village Safe Water Program. However, the real success of that program depends on the recognition by state policy makers that there is no “one size fits all” approach to bringing those systems to rural Alaska. What works in one community may not work in another. Efforts to provide infrastructure that the community can support in the future should continue. The state's long-term health care policy, therefore, should improve and ensure the state's adherence to the “plan” for bringing sustainable and appropriate safe water and wastewater systems to every Alaskan community.*

**Goal Four: Access to Health Care**

**What's the problem?** *Accessing quality health care is difficult for many Alaskans, both urban and rural. There is little consistency of access to health care for all Alaskans – some have it all the time, some have it some times, and some have it hardly at all. In Alaska's urban areas there is a lack of access to necessary specialized care and efficient "same-day" primary care. In rural communities, there is often no access at all to health care because of a variety of barriers, including costs, geography, transportation challenges, lack of providers and much more.*

**Why this is important?** *The lack of access to quality health care contributes to Alaskans' wellness challenges. Being able to guarantee timely access to primary care, in particular, presents significant challenges; but appropriate primary care is one of the most effective means for keeping Alaskans healthy. There was considerable discussion among members about the positive impact of Community Health Centers, and the state's public health nurses, in providing greater access to health and health care opportunities.*

*There was agreement among Council members on two major points relevant to health care access. First, Community Health Centers (CHCs) are a valuable part of the "health care safety net" for Alaskans. Second, the state's public health nursing structure is one of the most important mechanisms for affording greater access to a wider range of health care. The problem with CHCs and public health nursing is that both programs are under-funded. Community Health Centers are federally funded, and most states provide supplemental financial assistance because CHCs are viewed as an important part of the overall health care system in those states. Partly due to the provision of health care services to the under-insured and uninsured, CHCs consistently face budgetary challenges. In Alaska, CHCs receive virtually no funding from the state. Similarly, the state's public health nursing system has been chronically under-funded for years. Ever-decreasing state dollars for the Public Health Division has meant that fewer and fewer public health nurses are able to do their important work improving the health of Alaskans.*

**What should be done:** *Accessing health care should not be difficult for Alaskans, and broad policies that improve access to primary care and behavioral health care should be the focus of any state health care policy. Strategies should include: 1) the state becoming more actively engaged as an active investor in the Community Health Center system through supplemental funding and regulatory relief; 2) appropriate funding for and utilization of the state's Public Health Division, in particular the Public Health Nursing program; 3) building monetary and other incentives into the health care system which encourage Alaskans to more effectively utilize primary care opportunities; 4) leveraging information technologies such as tele-health and electronic health record systems which can improve access while reducing costs; and 5) reducing barriers to private clinicians practicing in underserved areas. In the very short term, the state could take the lead in guaranteeing that the required "match" associated with the current \$10 million Federal Communications Commission tele-health grant is made.*



### **Goal Five: Prevention and Personal Responsibility**

**What's the problem:** *Prevention and personal responsibility play too small a role in health care, including maintaining and improving health. While Alaskans may understand the connection between their lifestyle choices and their individual health, for the most part they do not make a connection between personal choices, having a personal stake in their health, and the cost of their health care. Alaskans are not optimally encouraged and equipped to make the kinds of choices that improve health and subsequently decrease health care costs.*

**Why this is important:** *More healthy Alaskans translates into fewer sick Alaskans, and improved quality of life with resultant cost savings. A clear understanding of the role of personal choice in individual health status and the impact on health care costs, as well as the central role of government in supporting health choices, are critical components in developing long-term strategic health and health care policies.*

**What should be done about it:** *Solving this problem requires a two-pronged approach. First, Alaskans must be encouraged to play a much greater role in their own wellness by having both a personal and financial "stake" in their own health. Having a "stake" in their own health is the product of a personal investment in wellness, and realizing the financial benefits of saved dollars by maintaining healthy lifestyles. In the opinion of the Council, the most effective mechanism for increasing the personal health investment of Alaskans is incentivizing and supporting positive change.*

*Second, governments, school districts, tribal entities and other employers are uniquely situated to be catalysts for positive change. These entities have the influence to help Alaskans understand and make healthy choices, while at the same time avoiding those lifestyle decisions that contribute to poor health.*

### **Goal Six: Statewide Leadership**

**What's the problem:** *A lack of consistent statewide leadership makes development of comprehensive statewide health and health care policy challenging.*

**Why this is important:** *Public leaders have a pivotal role as catalysts for positive change. Commitment at the executive and legislative levels to comprehensive and lasting change will effect health and health care in Alaska.*

**What should be done about it:** *The Council believes that government has an obligation to "jump start" healthy choices through incentives, and in addition build the necessary incentive structures for the future. Positive change will be the result of a concerted effort by the governor and the legislature, through partnering with local communities, in a long-term commitment to maintain positive momentum. The key is elevating the discussion of health and health care to the statewide level.*

*One of the most effective mechanisms for solidifying that long-term commitment to bringing positive change to Alaska's health care system is to establish through statute a quasi-independent "Alaska Health Care Commission," which would seek to provide advice on innovative solutions, and act as a catalyst for positive change. The Commission would be responsible for advising state leaders on incentivizing positive lifestyle choices; fostering ongoing research; controlling health care costs; improving access, and ensuring a sustainable health care workforce.*

### **Goal Seven: Health Insurance**

**What's the problem:** *Over 100,000 Alaskans – including more than 14,000 children – are without health insurance at some time during any given year. When insurance is made available, there is often a misconception that it should cover everything, from routine and predictable events to catastrophic occurrences and long-term care; this misconception increases the cost of health insurance beyond the reach of many Alaskans.*

**Why this is important:** *Having access to health insurance coverage is one of the most significant determinants of access to appropriate health care. Alaskans who do not have health insurance are often unable to get the services they need to become healthy, and to maintain wellness.*

*When uninsured Alaskans do seek health and health care services, it is often for expensive chronic conditions which could possibly have been avoided if they had had health insurance coverage, or access to appropriate primary care. When Alaskans who may not be eligible for Medicaid and Denali KidCare do access health care, they are often unable to pay and often seek care in a hospital emergency room, which is the most expensive and inefficient mechanism for receiving primary care. The costs of such access are borne across the whole health care system, which raises the overall costs of health care in Alaska. When the uninsured who are not eligible for Medicaid and Denali KidCare do pay for health and health care services, they often do so at significant personal and family financial impact.*

*Not having insurance is only part of the problem, and simply providing insurance under the current structure is not the answer. With the exception of preventative health services, comprehensive health insurance is not an efficient way to pay for routine and predictable care, such as the common cold, ear infections, hang nails, and sprained ankles. Whereas health insurance IS the most important tool for protecting people from unplanned catastrophic health events, it is an inefficient way to pay for routine expenditures. Therefore, the current system, which relies on insurance to pay for routine and predictable health care expenses, raises the costs of premiums above the reach of many Alaskans.*

**What should be done about it:** *More Alaskans need to be covered by efficient health insurance plans. Increasing the number of Alaskans covered by efficient health insurance will be the result of several specific actions. In the short-term, the Council recommends that the state immediately pursue and support change in the Denali KidCare program to make Alaskan children in families at 200% of the federal poverty level eligible for coverage. While there was a majority vote among Council members regarding this expansion of Denali KidCare coverage, the role of that program within an efficient and effective system of health care coverage is worthy of continued debate at the statewide level, through the recommended "Alaska Health Care Commission."*

*To most effectively cover the adults and remaining children without health insurance, bringing consumerism to the forefront of Alaska's health insurance structure is important. Alaskans should have access to choices, through a wide range of health insurance options, including at the very least high deductible coverage with a strong prevention component. The key to success is insurance that at least covers catastrophic care, so no Alaskan suffers from the extreme financial burden of catastrophic or unanticipated health events. Whereas some uninsured Alaskans are not working, most are working for employers who would like to, but cannot necessarily afford to, provide health insurance coverage for their employees. Therefore, through incentives, Alaskan employers should be encouraged to offer a wide range of coverage choices, to include at a minimum, high deductible coverage.*

*Consumerism is an essential component of bringing rationality to the health insurance structure in Alaska, and extending coverage to as many Alaskans as possible. The key to success is insurance that at least covers catastrophic care, so no Alaskan suffers from the extreme financial burden of catastrophic or unanticipated health events. In addition, insurance must be consumer-owned, market-responsive and portable; this recommendation has received attention elsewhere in this report. Coverage options debated in the Council's discussions, which are by no means exhaustive, include Health Savings Accounts, Health Opportunity Accounts, and high-deductible plans with a strong prevention component. This list provides a solid foundation from which to continue the ongoing discussion about expanding health care coverage for all Alaskans.*

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Resolving the health and health care issues in Alaska will not be the result of a single solution. Instead, bringing real and lasting change means working together in partnership. Many of the solutions presented within this report fall squarely within the purview of state government. But no matter how committed state government is, solutions will not be forthcoming without involving all stakeholders as partners for change – from individual Alaskans to families, nonprofit organizations and private sector employers and employees, communities and local governments, tribal entities, state government, the governor, the legislature, and the federal government.

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The Council has deliberately not prioritized solutions for solving the problems it has identified with the health and health care system in Alaska. Indeed, all of the problems must be addressed concurrently if real, long-term change is to take place. Having said that, within those identified by the Council, one is definitely the larger-order problem, meaning if we can solve it, many of the other problems will be alleviated. That problem is the lack of prevention and personal responsibility.

By improving the place of prevention and personal responsibility in the health and health care decision-making rubric of Alaskans, costs of health care could be lower than they otherwise would be. With concentration on a wellness model of health care, as well as state support for the Community Health Center system and a robust public nursing program, the current access problems could be significantly reduced. Most Alaskans will have both the motivation and the means to maintain their own wellness. And with greater wellness, the composition of the health care workforce will likely change, decreasing the dependence on health care professionals who are the most difficult and most expensive to attract and retain.

Becoming the healthiest people in the nation is indeed a grand vision – but it is real and achievable.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Alaska Health Care Strategies Planning Council  
December 23, 2007

**Appendix A: Strategy Implementation Table**

**2008 / 2009 / 2010 / 2011 / 2012 / 2013 / 2014**

Short-Term Strategies <i>(for implementation between 2008 and 2010)</i>	Action Required (Policy, Regulation, Statute)	Expense	Implementation Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an ongoing and quasi-independent “Alaska Health Care Commission.”</li> <li>• Promote incentives for clinic use, rather than the use of emergency rooms for routine/primary care.</li> <li>• Promote the use and expansion of Community Health Centers throughout the state.</li> <li>• More effectively target recruitment of health care professionals by marketing Alaska to rest of nation/world as a great place to live, work, raise a family, enjoy nature, etc.</li> <li>• Conduct a comprehensive, statewide health care workforce assessment.</li> <li>• Continue to support Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium’s ongoing efforts to develop sustainable, community-specific water and wastewater capacity in all villages.</li> <li>• Increase quality of and access to Telemedicine, Community Health Aides/Practitioners, Community Mental Health Aides and Community Dental Health Aides.</li> <li>• Implement a prevention-focused “Fit for Life” social marketing program that is multigenerational and culturally aware.</li> <li>• Emphasize the role of the public health nurses in prevention and wellness – from well-baby checks on up to flu shots for elders.</li> <li>• Support programs to encourage employers to offer employees “time off” for making healthy lifestyle choices and maintaining wellness.</li> <li>• Institute “Silver Sneakers Programs” – for elders – to keep elders healthy.</li> <li>• Ensure public health immunization funding.</li> <li>• Fund free and/or low-cost clinics, keeping in mind uninsured Alaskans.</li> <li>• Incorporate a “Wellness Certificate” into the PFD program, and give a five percent boost in the dividend for maintaining a healthy lifestyle.</li> <li>• Foster a state culture through policy that rewards schools for wellness.</li> <li>• Provide financial incentives for “healthy schools.”</li> <li>• Support the ongoing efforts to establish comprehensive health care insurance options to employees of Alaska’s nonprofit sector.</li> </ul>			

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay the tuition – or forgive student loans – for residents from rural Alaska who are willing to practice -- after graduation – in their home community.</li> <li>• Institute student loan forgiveness for medical/health professionals and para-professionals who make a commitment to stay in Alaska.</li> <li>• Provide grants for low-income vocational/tech students in Certified Nurses Assistant/Pharmacy Tech programs.</li> <li>• Increase the presence of public health system, particularly public health nurses, especially in rural communities.</li> <li>• Follow through on existing state plans for safe drinking water and wastewater, through the Village Safe Water Program and other efforts.</li> <li>• Support and expand telemedicine and tele-behavioral medicine -- include education, maintenance and equipment upgrades.</li> <li>• Increase behavioral health training and support,</li> <li>• Increase available slots in Physician Assistant and Nurse Practitioner programs at the University of Alaska and with other academic partners.</li> <li>• Increase number of Residents in Family Practice Residency Program.</li> <li>• Create a greater awareness of the distinction between routine and predictable health care costs (less expensive) and unanticipated or catastrophic costs (more expensive).</li> <li>• Promote Health Savings Accounts and high deductible insurance plans – for individuals and employers.</li> <li>• Provide incentives for providers and consumers, with performance measures and rewards (for providers), based on evidence-based results.</li> <li>• Foster better informed consumers through creation of a dynamic (continuously updated) website providing transparent quality and cost information about medical services, prescriptions, etc.</li> <li>• Build teaching capacity in K-12 schools to excite young Alaskans about the physical sciences generally, and the health care field in particular.</li> <li>• Increase penalties for selling alcohol to youth.</li> </ul>			
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Long-Term Strategies <i>(for implementation between 2010 - 2014)</i>	Action Required (Policy, Regulation, Statute)	Expense	Implementation Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support information technology improvements.</li> <li>• Promote insurance that is portable, consumer-focused and consumer owned, purchased with pre-tax dollars.</li> <li>• Increase Alaska WWAMI seats to 50 /year – the projected need to meet demand in the next 10 years.</li> <li>• Institute doctoral NP program at UAA.</li> <li>• Increase the availability of education programs for health care disciplines.</li> </ul>			

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Expand State role in direct funding of and improving access to Community Health Centers.</li><li>● Foster a consumer-directed health care approach to long-term care.</li><li>● Encourage the implementation of a consumer-directed health care system.</li><li>● Integrate “consumerism,” encouraging people to shop around for the best quality and appropriate cost and consider personal responsibility.</li><li>● Encourage formation of Tobacco Free communities, businesses and workplaces through Statewide Clean Indoor Air Act.</li><li>● Institute/Increase Alcohol taxes.</li><li>● Increase fluoride in drinking water.</li><li>● Reduce barriers to establishing and running CHCs: (state and federal red tape).</li><li>● Where establishing a CHC is difficult, encourage creation of public-private partnership in creating primary/urgent care clinics.</li></ul>			
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**Appendix B: Summary of Public Comment Received by the Council**

- Support the Community Health Centers as a way to improve access and decrease use of the emergency room for primary care.
- Improve e-health
- Increase workforce, specifically mid-level practitioners
- Incorporate incentives to attract and retain necessary health care workers, including loan forgiveness and other repayment incentives
- Make sure to get the mix right of what is needed in the health care workforce
- Recruitment programs are best done in state
- Build interest in the health care field at the middle and high school level
- Develop a statewide group with oversight responsibility for recruitment and retention – because it cost too much for individual organizations to do it
- Eliminate shortage of UA educators in health care professions
- Put fluoride in rural water systems
- Improve the place of preventative dental service in the health care continuum
- Prevention, collaboration and partnerships are the key to improving access
- Building existing programs makes the most sense, versus making new programs and the associated structures
- Remove bureaucratic barriers to effective health care access
- Examine innovative solutions that involve Medicaid reimbursement
- Acknowledge and build upon the work of public health nurses and the public health nursing program
- Include alternative treatments when talking about prevention and personal responsibility
- Improve worksite health as a cost-saver
- Most feel there should be basic, portable insurance coverage for all Alaskans
- Concentrate on preventing sickness rather than curing it
- Should be at least some mechanism to insure a minimum coverage for all Alaskans
- People with disabilities have real trouble finding primary care – the state should close the gap in those services
- Alaskans need a range of services that are affordable – maybe the state should subsidize those services
  - Don't forget the severely disadvantaged – Alaska's working poor
- Funding for substance abuse and mental health are effective preventative services, which lead to increase wellness
- State must support the e-health FCC grant
- State should not be shy about supplementing the loss of federal Medicaid dollars with state support
- Behavioral health in Alaska has taken huge cuts, and the system is on the verge of crisis
- The broadly stated goals of the Council really skip over the importance of behavioral health and substance abuse as preventative factors



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- Oral health needs to play a more significant role in overall health
- Need more dental techs in the health care workforce
- Realize that turning 65 in Alaska means no more health care for most elders
- Make it easy for people to navigate the health care system – now it is really difficult
- Remove barriers that prevent Alaskans from receiving necessary primary care, and to get Denali KidCare after birth
- There **MUST** be a continued forum for addressing health care issues in the long term

### **Appendix C: Alaska Health Policy Council Members**

The council is composed of 14 Alaskans appointed by the governor:

- Jeff Davis of Anchorage has served as president of Premera Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alaska for nine years, which provides insurance for 180,000 Alaskans statewide.
- Cathy Giessel of Anchorage is a registered nurse and advanced nurse practitioner whose career and experience spans more than 30 years.
- Dr. Derek Hagen of Anchorage is a doctor of osteopathy associated with Primary Care Associates, the largest private family practice in the state.
- Thomas Hendrix, PhD, of Anchorage is an assistant professor at the University of Alaska School of Nursing specializing in the policy, economics, assessment, and fundamentals of health care.
- Don Kashevaroff of Anchorage is the chair and president of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and serves as the primary spokesman for the Consortium regarding state and federal funding, legislation, and regulatory issues.
- Brian Slocum of Fairbanks is the administrator at Tanana Valley Clinic, the largest multi-specialty, multi-site practice in Alaska.
- Dr. Michael Carroll of Fairbanks is a private practice physician, specializing in internal medicine and oncology.
- Donna Fenske of Homer served the State of Alaska as a public health nurse from 1979 to 2004 and most recently has provided community health aide services in Port Graham and Nanwalek clinics, and nursing services to K-12 students in rural communities in the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District.
- Steve Horn of Soldotna is the executive director of the Alaska Behavioral Health Association whose members are the businesses that provide direct services to recipients of behavioral health services throughout the state.
- Dr. Cathy Baldwin-Johnson of Wasilla is a private practice family physician and the 2002 National Family Physician of the Year from the American Academy of Family Physicians.
- Karen Rhoades of Wasilla is the owner and operator of Northern Living Centers, a five bed assisted-living home.
- Tim Joyce of Cordova is a three-term mayor of the City of Cordova who has dealt with escalating community medical costs, a constant turnover of medical center administrators and a community medical center that is continually in need of city assistance.
- Rod Betit of Juneau is the president and CEO of the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNA), a not-for-profit association with members representing hospitals, nursing homes, and Native Alaska health care providers.
- Dr. Bob Urata of Juneau has served as a family physician for over 23 years, and has served on the Bartlett Regional Hospital Board of Directors.
- Commissioner Karleen Jackson managed the Health Council. Serving as ex-officio, non-voting members were Senator Bettye Davis and Representative Peggy Wilson, chairs of the Health, Education and Social Services committees in the Alaska State Legislature.