



Alaska Primary Care
ASSOCIATION

April 8, 2018

Senator David Wilson, Chair
Senate Health & Social Services Committee
Alaska Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Opposition to SB58/HB60 Senior Benefits Program elimination and cuts to program

Dear Senator Wilson:

The Alaska Primary Care Association (APCA) supports the operations and development of Alaska's 27 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Alaska Health Centers voted to oppose cuts to, and the elimination of, the Senior Benefits Program in their 2019 legislative priorities.

In 2018, Alaska Community Health Centers served the primary health care needs of almost 113,000 Alaskans. Of those, one in eight (14,466) were adults over the age of 65. 3,951 of these patients were dually eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid, indicating they would be eligible for the Senior Benefit Program. FQHCs are responsible for assisting all their patients by addressing barriers to quality care, improving health outcomes, and ensuring that all their patients maximize their coverage for benefits to which they are entitled.

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age that affect the health outcomes of patients. These include financial resources, food security, and access to affordable housing, amongst others. While modest in size, the Senior Benefit Program provides basic income to senior patients with the lowest incomes and greatest need of support. As has been stated by the State of Alaska, many of these lowest income seniors have chronic conditions that require monthly expenditures for prescription co-pays and other services. Inability to keep chronic care conditions and health issues in control frequently leads to care in emergency departments and other high cost settings.

While the budget reduction to this program is alarming and will have direct impact on the health outcomes and lives of lowest income seniors, the proposed elimination of the program in statute will be even more damaging. Once eliminated in statute, this vehicle for supporting Alaska's lowest income seniors would be very difficult to replace.

APCA and Alaska Health Centers urge the committee to reject this bill.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Nancy Merriman
Executive Director