

HB 292

Home and Community-Based Services Waiver

"An Act relating to home and community-based services; and providing for an effective date."

Overview

Alaska has the fastest-growing senior population per capita in the United States (1), and one of the highest increases of people aged 65 and older with Alzheimer's or other dementias (2). Yet, **Alaskans across the state do not have access to quality, affordable, and well-trained home and community-based care.**

Despite a clear need and growing demand for in-home long-term services and supports, many seniors and people with disabilities under Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waivers and Community First Choice Medicaid State Plan (K) face barriers to accessing personal care services, as well as finding and retaining the Personal Care Assistant (PCA) of their choice.

Individuals have seen service levels cut, been stuck on waiting lists for longer periods of time, and been unable to hire the caregiver of their choice, while those providing personal care services have seen a decline in hourly wages over the last decade and a decrease in work hours.

The lack of home care infrastructure especially impacts rural Alaska where home care would be the only option available. Without home care, many Alaskans are forced to move thousands of miles away, leaving behind culture, family, and community. These Alaskans are being denied the option to maintain dignity and independence in their lifelong homes.

WHAT IS THE SITUATION?

Declining Wages

Wages of PCAs in Alaska have gone down and are now lower than they were a decade ago (3), impacting a workforce composed overwhelmingly of women (4).

Longer time on waitlists

Today, people with disabilities in Alaska have to wait, on average, more than 4 years to get access to services, and many individuals living in rural and remote areas do not have access to these services at all.

Budget cuts

Alaska has cut its Medicaid investment for home and community-based services (HCBS). While the federal revenue to the state for HCBS increased by 10.7% between FY2019 and FY2020, state expenditures decreased by 16.5%, and overall spending decreased by 2% (5).

Service level reductions

Service levels for Personal Care Services have decreased by 23% from 2016 – 2020 despite the growing need for this service (6). These cuts leave individuals increasingly reliant on the unpaid labor of untrained friend or family, or without much needed service and supports, putting them at a higher risk of injury or hospitalization.

Over-reliance on unpaid friends and family

Pressure on the 85,000 Alaskans who provide unpaid care to friends and family members, costing the state more than a billion dollars in economic productivity. In 2020, 12,000 unpaid and untrained family caregivers provided more than 20 million hours of care for people with Alzheimer's and other dementias, with an estimated value of \$406 million dollars (7).

HB 292 Overview Continued

HOW WOULD HB 292 HELP?

HB 292 takes initial steps to ensure that those who need in-home services and supports are getting the quality and level of care needed to live with dignity and independence in their own homes and communities, while providing more stability to those providing personal care services.

WHAT WOULD HB292 DO?

Prevent unwarranted service level cuts and service terminations for Personal Care Services. It does this by requiring assessments that result in service level reductions to go through the same review process as service terminations.

Restore unwarranted service level cuts and service terminations for Personal Care Services from 2019 to present.

Permit legally responsible individuals to become Personal Care Assistants under HCBS waivers and Community First Choice Medicaid State Plan (K).

REFERENCES

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5. "FY 2020 ANNUAL MEDICAID REFORM REPORT." DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES, NOVEMBER 2020. [HTTP://DHSS.ALASKA.GOV/HEALTHYALASKA/DOCUMENTS/REDESIGN/FY-2020-ANNUAL-MEDICAID-REFORM-REPORT.PDF](http://DHSS.ALASKA.GOV/HEALTHYALASKA/DOCUMENTS/REDESIGN/FY-2020-ANNUAL-MEDICAID-REFORM-REPORT.PDF)
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