

Alaskan Seniors

Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

Alaska Commission on Aging - 2024 Legislative Priorities

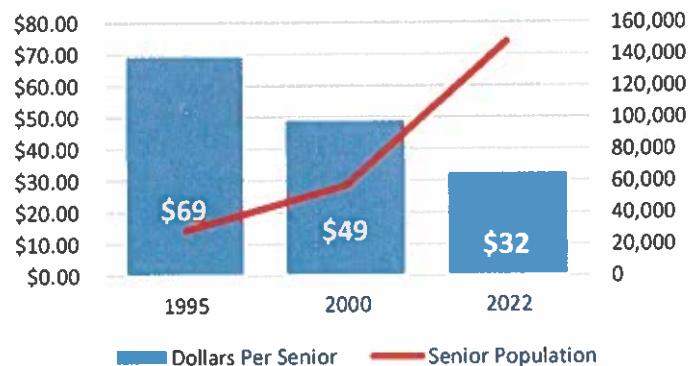
(1) Support senior grant services and Centers for Independent Living.

Senior grant services administered by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services provide critical supports for Older Alaskans (60+) throughout the state. Grant funds provide meals, transportation, household assistance, health promotion, adult day programs and other services that allow individuals to remain in their homes and communities. These grants also fund Alaska's Centers for Independent Living to provide information, referral and assistance with accessing senior services by community. Funding has remained flat for this growing demographic in spite of the increase in costs driven by inflation.

Home and community-based services assist Seniors to stay healthy and independent and prevent Seniors from needing more intensive and costly levels of care. Providing meals, transportation, assistance with errands, access to medicine, socialization and other low-cost services allows seniors to keep living independently. These services are delivered by senior centers and local non-profits and are even more critical during this inflationary period to address needs in home-bound isolated seniors. The Federal Older Americans Act funds are matched with state and local funds as an investment in the health and safety of seniors statewide. In FY2023, Senior Grant funds (Federal and State) totaled \$18,431,305, serving 21,054 seniors aged 60 and over, at an average cost of \$700 per senior.

Recommended Action: Advocate for increased funding to ensure sustainable and comprehensive support for Alaska's growing senior population through essential services and independent living programs.

Older Americans Act
Inflation Adjusted Dollars Per Alaska
Senior and Senior Population
1995 to 2022

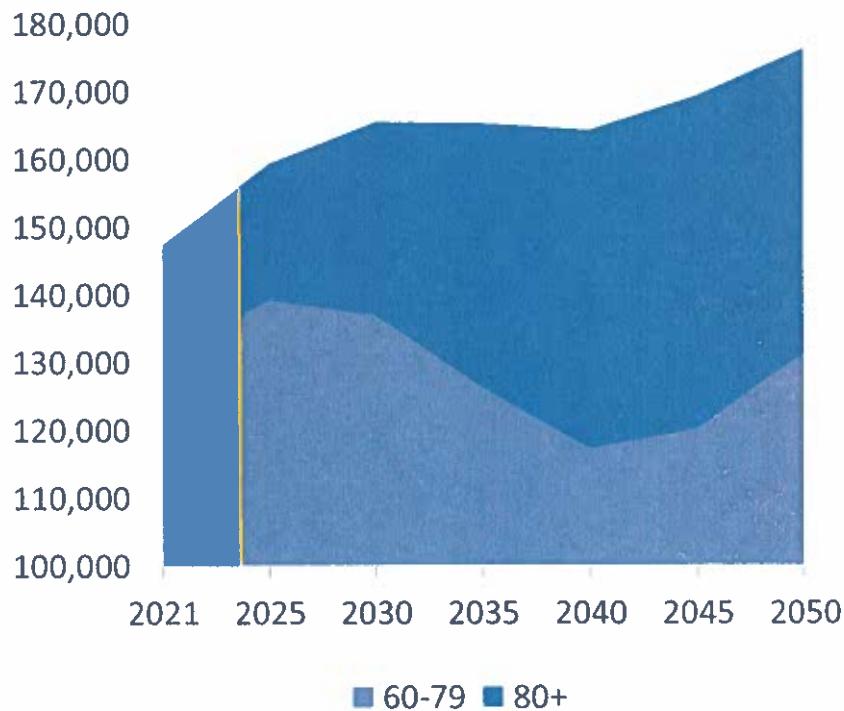


(2) Maintain capital funding for Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's (AFHC's) Senior Citizen Housing Development Fund.

Senior Citizens Housing Development Fund (SCHDF) funding in the amount of \$3 million GF (Governor's Budget, increase of \$1.25 million) remains intact in the budget. From 2001 to 2023, the SCHDF constructed 1,756 new senior housing units statewide. This represents an average of 76 new senior housing units per year, with 40 new units added in FY2023. The SCHDF is an important grant program to address the need for safe, quality, and affordable housing for seniors statewide. The Commission supports any proposals that increase access to affordable housing for the senior population.

Recommended Action: Support the continuation and enhancement of the SCHDF to ensure the ongoing development of safe, affordable housing, addressing the critical needs for senior citizens across Alaska. Capacity must increase capacity by 320 housing units annually to keep up with senior population growth.

Alaska Senior Population Projections



(3) Reauthorization of the Senior Benefits Program (SB170/SB172/HB242)

The Senior Benefits Program is set to sunset in June and is vital for providing essential benefits to seniors. Its continuation is of utmost importance for the well-being of Alaska's senior population. The Senior Benefits Program in Alaska is a vital state-funded initiative aimed at providing financial assistance to low-income seniors aged 65 and older. Its primary goal is to help these seniors meet basic living costs such as food, heating, and healthcare. Eligibility for the program is based on income levels, with different tiers offering varying amounts of monthly payments to assist those in need. Funded entirely by the State of Alaska, the program plays a crucial role in ensuring a minimum standard of living for older residents. Seniors can apply through the Alaska Department of Health, and the application process typically involves providing proof of income and residency. Periodic reauthorization by the state legislature is necessary for the program's continuity, making it a subject of legislative attention and action.

Recommended Action: Advocate for the reauthorization of the Senior Benefits Program to ensure ongoing support for Alaska's seniors.

(4) Nurse Licensure Compact Bill (HB149/SB130)

The Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) will allow out of state nurses reciprocity from the 39 other states to get to work for Alaskans, helping to relieve the workforce crisis. Alaska already does and will continue to need to recruit the majority of our nurses from other states. Alaska programs produce just 324 graduates to fill the need for 1,500 nurse openings annually, which will grow to more than 5,000 by 2030 as our population and healthcare workforce ages. The NLC significantly increases Alaska's ability to find and hire out-of-state nurses to fill vacancies. The nursing shortage negatively impacts healthcare access, drives up healthcare costs, and threatens the health of our growing senior population. This risks the health of Alaska's elders and adds unnecessary stress for family caregivers.

Recommended Action: Encourage the passage of the Nurse Licensure Compact Bill to enhance the healthcare workforce for Alaska's seniors.

(5) Provide support for local transportation programs through capital projects and community grants.

Accessible transportation has remained a consistent need for Alaska's Seniors over the years. Whether through existing public transportation programs, through local senior programs, or by non-profits, finding travel to meet senior health, food and social needs remains very difficult. Increasing funding for programs that require state match is essential. In addition, supporting transportation infrastructure and maintenance programs is also essential; broken sidewalks, poor drainage or snow removal are all safety and health issues that are particularly

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challenging to Seniors. Increasing operating funds for maintenance and maintaining state match for federal programs is essential to minimizing risks to Seniors. These challenges are compounded by the unique needs that must be tailored to urban, rural, and remote communities.

Recommended Action: Enhance funding for transportation infrastructure and maintenance, and uphold state match commitments for federal programs, to ensure safe and accessible transportation options for Alaska's senior community.

