

ALASKA PRIMARY CARE ASSOCIATION, INC.

"... Uncompromising in the pursuit of access to primary care for all Alaskans."



Honorable Mike Chenault
Honorable Members of the House of Representatives
Juneau, Alaska 99801

March 12, 2009

Re: Support of CSHJR 10 (HSS) *Veterans' Health Care*

Dear Speaker of the House Chenault and Members of the House of Representatives,

The Alaska Primary Care Association (APCA) works to promote primary care access for all Alaskans and is strongly in support of CSHJR 10 (HSS) *Veterans' Health Care*. Many of the veterans in Alaska reside in outlying areas where they are unable to access VA health care facilities. Veterans need and deserve high quality health care that is readily accessible.

When veterans' medical conditions are not service-related and do not meet certain criteria, veterans in outlying areas have three choices: 1) cover their own expenses to travel to access VA care; 2) go without needed care; or 3) access services at a non-VA clinic, very likely to be one of the 141 Community Health Center (CHC) sites in the state. Many veterans cannot afford the first choice; in addition, paying for plane fare for a strep test or a bout with the flu is unreasonable. Sadly, the second choice – not receiving needed care – is far too common; our veterans deserve better.

For those veterans who opt for the third choice, often, the CHC does not receive reimbursement because the veteran did not file the necessary paperwork in advance. The CHC typically eats the cost. Although the APCA has been working with the Alaska VA Health Care System to increase access for veterans who live outside the vicinity of the VA clinics, little progress has been made due to federal barriers. Currently, veterans cannot readily use their VA health benefits to receive care at CHCs because a national policy advocating VA-CHC collaboration has not emerged in an effective way. CSHJR 10 (HSS) would encourage such collaboration.

The APCA urges the VA system to utilize the CHC infrastructure across Alaska rather than duplicate services by establishing new VA clinics where CHCs already exist. CHCs are well-positioned to provide access to cost-effective, quality care for Alaska's veterans whether through a Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) arrangement, a network arrangement, or individual arrangements with individual CHCs.

Lastly, it is very important that Congress adequately fund VA health care so that veterans from every corner of Alaska have access – all veterans, those returning from the current conflict with pressing issues as well as those who served previously and have increasing health care needs as they age.

The Alaska Primary Care adamantly supports CSHJR 10 (HSS) *Veterans' Health Care* and appreciates the Alaska State Legislature working to promote health care access for veterans throughout the state by passing this important resolution in order to communicate this priority to the U.S. Congress.

Supporting health care for Alaska's veterans,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shelley S. Hughes".

Shelley S. Hughes
Government Affairs Director

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
*ADVISORY BOARD ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ABUSE
and ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH BOARD*

SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR

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March 6, 2009

Representative David Guttenberg
Alaska State Capitol, Room 418
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Support for CSHJR 10

Representative Guttenberg:

The Advisory Board on Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the Alaska Mental Health Board appreciate your recognition of our nation's responsibility to our returning veterans and military service members. We support CSHJR 10 calling for a comprehensive response to our service members' health care needs, including the behavioral health needs of veterans and returning service members.

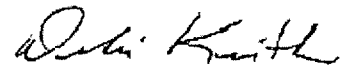
We support expanded cooperation between the Veteran's Administration and Alaska's community health care providers to increase access for returning veterans with service-connected disabilities. Many veterans are returning to rural communities. The most effective and efficient way for them to access needed health care is through community mental health centers, substance abuse treatment centers, community health centers, and tribal health organizations. By expanding partnerships between the Veteran's Administration and local health care providers, we can insure that veterans with service-connected disabilities receive the health care they need as close to home as possible.

We appreciate your advocacy on behalf of our military service members and look forward to continuing work with you on this issue.

Sincerely,



Lonnie Walters, Chair
ABADA



Debi Keith, Chair
AMHB



Military Order of the *Purple Heart* **Department of Alaska**



Date: March 6, 2009

**The Honorable David Guttenberg
House Military and Veterans Affairs
Alaska State Capitol, Room 418
Juneau, AK 99801-1182**

Subject: Support for HRJ 10.

Dear Representative Guttenberg, and other sponsors/supporters of HJR 10.

The MOPH, Department of Alaska, is in full support of HJR 10 and its intent to provide the best health care available to our veterans. Those who answered the call to defend our country have fully earned the right to have the country be there for them in their time of need.

As the current military conflict continues there will be an ongoing need to care for those who will stand among others who served previously. It is only fair for our nation to provide the care and assistance that our veterans have rightfully earned. Reasonable access to that health care is equally important, especially to those who suffer the most and often need special assistance just to get to the location providing that health care. While many veterans are fortunate to be able to drive to and walk to the point of health care assistance, it is important to not forget about those who need wheel chairs or other special assistance. The need to reach out to provide adequate care can be stated like this "LET NO VETERAN BE LEFT BEHIND" and that responsibility falls on the system charged with providing the health care that has already been paid for by our nations veterans.

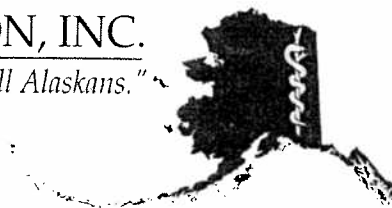
HRJ 10 is a commendable approach in proving that Alaska truly cares about its veteran population. As such HRJ 10 has the support of the MOPH, Department of Alaska.

Ron Siebels

**Ron Siebels
MOPH, Department Commander, Alaska**

ALASKA PRIMARY CARE ASSOCIATION, INC.

"... Uncompromising in the pursuit of access to primary care for all Alaskans."



Honorable Wes Keller, Co-Chair
Honorable Bob Herron, Co-Chair
House Health and Social Services Committee
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

March 6, 2009

Re: Support of CSHJR 10 (MLV) *Veterans' Health Care*

Dear (H)HSS Co-Chairs Keller and Herron and Members of the House Health & Social Services Committee,

The Alaska Primary Care Association (APCA) works to promote primary care access for all Alaskans and is strongly in support of CSHJR 10 (MLV) *Veterans' Health Care*. Many of the veterans in Alaska reside in outlying areas where they are unable to access VA health care facilities. When their medical conditions are not service-related and do not meet certain criteria, these veterans in outlying areas have three choices: 1) cover their own expenses to travel to access VA care; 2) go without care; or 3) access services at a non-VA clinic, very likely to be one of the 141 Community Health Center (CHC) sites in the state.

For those veterans who opt for the third choice above, often, the CHC does not receive reimbursement because the veteran did not file the necessary paperwork in advance. The CHC typically eats the cost. Although the APCA has been working with the Alaska VA Health Care System to increase access for all the veterans who live outside the vicinity of the VA clinics, little progress has been made due to federal barriers within the VA system. Currently, veterans cannot readily use their VA health benefits to receive care at CHCs because a national policy advocating VA-CHC collaboration has not emerged in an effective way. CSHJR 10 (MLV) would encourage such collaboration.

The APCA urges the VA system to utilize the CHC infrastructure across Alaska rather than duplicate services by establishing new VA clinics where CHCs already exist. CHCs are well-positioned to provide access to cost-effective, quality care for Alaska's veterans whether through a CBOC arrangement, a network arrangement, or individual arrangements with individual CHCs

Lastly, it is very important that Congress adequately fund VA health care so that veterans from every corner of Alaska have access – all veterans, those returning from the current conflict with pressing issues as well as those who served previously and have increasing health care needs as they age.

The Alaska Primary Care adamantly supports CSHJR 10 (MLV) *Veterans' Health Care* and appreciates the Alaska State Legislature working to promote health care access for veterans throughout the state by passing this important resolution in order to communicate this priority to the U.S. Congress.

Supporting health care for Alaska's veterans,

Shelley S. Hughes
Government Affairs Director



Jill Hodges
Alaska Brain Injury Network
3745 Community Park Loop #140
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
March 6, 2009

Representative David Guttenberg
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol Building
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Guttenberg:

Thank you for your continued concern for returning service members in Alaska, as well as traumatic brain injury research. The Alaska Brain Injury Network supports HJR 10 – Veterans Health Care.

The Alaska Brain Injury Network is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 whose mission is to educate, plan, coordinate, and advocate for a comprehensive service delivery system for survivors of traumatic brain injury and their families.

ABIN supports the need for traumatic brain injury research; yet also requests the committees take into consideration equal access to rehabilitation and ongoing support programs for all Alaskans with cognitive disabilities.

Recent studies show at least 20% of service members will return from war with a traumatic brain injury. Additionally, there are 800 Alaskans each year hospitalized for more than 24 hours with a moderate to severe traumatic brain injury (Alaska Trauma Registry). There is an estimated 3000 Alaskans that visit the Emergency Department each year (CDC). Falls, motor vehicle crashes, assault, ATV/Snowmachine and bicycle crashes are the leading causes of traumatic brain injury in Alaska. The Alaska Brain Injury Network, "10 Year Plan for TBI in Alaska" highlights the many recommendations needed to provide information and referral, case management, acute and post-acute rehabilitation, educational supports, vocational supports, and long-term care to all Alaskans with brain injuries. (http://www.alaskabraininjury.org/documents_akbrain/10%20Year%20TBI%20Plan.pdf)

It is important to understand brain injury affects Civilians and Military Members alike. The health care issue is a matter of access, as well as availability of services locally and payment for those serves. Currently the Alaska VA Health Systems and the Department of Defense, 3rd Medical Unit are developing TBI clinics, polytrauma clinics and brain injury rehabilitation and ongoing support services which will benefit both active duty and veterans; however these programs are being built with little coordination among the state and community providers. At the same time Alaska community providers are planning the development of brain injury residential programs because currently there are civilians who are not receiving the care they need to recover and/or

best learn to live with their cognitive disability. Alaska does not have the workforce to operate three separate brain injury service delivery systems (including the Tribal system).

ABIN Activities Promoting Coordination among Military, State, Tribal, and Community

ABIN has been meeting with military partners since October 2007 for the purposes of determining the impact of returning service members with brain injuries and the impact it will have on state and community providers and resources. Participants have included 3rd medical unit, Elmendorf, TBI Clinic; Alaska VA Health Systems Polytrauma and Neuropsychology program; National Guard; Service and Family Assistance Center-Warrior Transition Battalion; Marines; Vet Center representatives; and Alaska Federal Health Care Partnership. We have learned that we can share outreach and awareness resources, but with program planning and implementation there has been little collaboration.

Potential Challenges

It is important to recognize how service members with brain injury may have challenges without the proper services and supports and are at risk for additional brain injuries. Highest rates of brain injury in civilians are among rural Alaskans and Alaska Natives. Many national guardsmen/women live in rural Alaska. A risk factor for a brain injury is history of brain injury; i.e. A national guardsperson is in an IED blast in Afghanistan. He/she returns to Alaska and may have challenges with balance, memory, attention, etc. He is riding his snowmachine and crashes, no helmet or maybe even with a helmet, he sustains an additional brain injury. There is potential for an influx of brain injuries in the next 5-20 years; a coordinated TBI prevention program and service delivery system would benefit all Alaskans.

Recommendations

The leadership and collaboration among State Government, Tribal Systems, Military and Veterans, and Community Providers is key to developing appropriate, timely, and coordinated brain injury services in Alaska.

If we do not have the essential brain injury awareness and treatment in Alaska

- Alaskans are at risk for bankruptcy, homelessness, divorce, or institutional care.
- This impacts State and local behavioral health, corrections, and educational systems greatly.

The Alaska Brain Injury Network encourages coordination in planning and implementation of brain injury programs in-state, as well as a state funding source to support the payment of brain injury rehabilitation and long-term care for both military and civilians.

The Alaska Brain Injury Network supports HJR 10-Veterans Health Care. We also support collaboration efforts in the planning and implementation of the services that are needed in both rural and urban Alaska to support veterans and civilians.

Sincerely,

Jill Hodges