

More Funding Needed To Fight Brain Injuries In Alaska

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Known as the silent epidemic, traumatic brain injury here in Alaska is the highest in the country. That's why partnerships are being made statewide to come up with solutions. The key word is solutions as leaders are looking for a permanent fix to decreasing traumatic brain injuries in Alaska. Experiencing a traumatic brain injury can change a life forever. "The recovery process after traumatic brain injury is journey that happens daily and it will continue," said Jill Hodges, of the Alaska Brain Injury Network. With 800 Alaskans being hospitalized or dying and over 10,000 Alaskans currently living with traumatic brain injuries, the consequences could be devastating.

"Yeah it will change your life and everybody else's around you," said Frank Box, who experienced a traumatic brain injury. "It can happen to you while you are walking across the street, you can fall and slip on the ice, or if you are playing a sport or riding a bicycle especially without a helmet, you can also suffer traumatic brain injury," said Christie Artuso, who is the director of the Providence Neuroscience Center. "My brother was a such a vibrant, outgoing person, and for this to happen to him is just unreal," said Duain White, whose brother suffered a traumatic brain injury in an ATV accident.

Taking into account that traumatic brain injuries are the leading cause of death and disability among children and young adults in Alaska, the need to be aware of what exactly can cause an injury is crucial. "We can't do that without the prevention needed and the education needed of our population to tell them about TBI (traumatic brain injury) and to also tell them on how to be healthy," said Don Kashevaroff, who is the CEO of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. "What we don't have in the state of Alaska is an effective rehabilitative program for people who have been afflicted with a traumatic brain injury can be helped with cognitive therapies, thru rehabilitative therapies to return to a normal functioning life," said Artuso.

Thirty years ago, one half of people who experienced a brain injury survived. Now the number has increased to 78 percent. But officials say the problem in our state is that traumatic brain injury survivors are not getting the services needed for life long living. While people who are victims of traumatic brain injuries do receive initial help there are many questions of what happens next for them. And with money in low supply to provide any additional support, officials say other agencies could be feeling the burden.

With over 10,000 Alaskans currently living with traumatic brain injuries, getting additional care and support is badly needed. "We were just released from the hospital and that was it there was no long term therapy, there was no where to go to offer cognitive therapy, long term physical therapy," said White. "We want to help them maintain their relationships, maintain their families, maintain their lifestyles," said Artuso. "What we need are community and governmental support to do that because currently there is no resources."

Adding more resources is what folks are banking on in helping their loved ones live normal functioning lives. "Is that all we can offer him, is that the best he's going to be doing the rest of his life, its very frustrating," said White. "Treatment, rehabilitation services are essential, they are the key to recovery and sometimes eventual abilities for our brothers or sisters, and family members," said Hodges. With no programs in place to offer continuous follow up service, studies show traumatic brain survivors are more likely to be substance abusers or become jobless or homeless straining other state and city services.

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