

Alaska Dispatch News

As Alaska's population ages, health care employment is increasing

Annie Zak; December 28th, 2016 – updated December 29th, 2016

Hospital employment in Alaska has increased steadily in the past 15 years, with "stronger-than-average growth" in the last decade, according to a [new economic trends report](#) from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

The total number of hospital jobs in Alaska was about 9,000 in 2000, and grew to 13,186 last year, according to numbers from the Labor Department.

As Alaska's population ages, baby boomers are fueling that increase with demand for services.

"The older population is growing faster here than it is in the rest of the U.S., on average," said Labor Department research analyst Mali Abrahamson, in an email.

In the overall health care industry, employment has grown from 31,900 jobs in November 2010 to an estimated 36,800 jobs last month, according to monthly job numbers from the Labor Department. Outside of hospitals, that sector also includes nursing facilities, clinics, dentists and more.

Within that category, hospital jobs span everything from doctors and management to transportation, grounds cleaning and food preparation. The most common hospital jobs are in nursing, the report found.

The state has 21 general hospitals as well as one psychiatric and substance-abuse hospital and one specialty hospital, the report said. Those general hospitals include small rural hospitals, such as Kakanak Hospital in Dillingham or Samuel Simmonds Memorial Hospital in Utqiagvik, formerly known as Barrow.

Private hospitals are where most of the growth is happening, and where most hospital jobs already are, in contrast with local and federal government hospitals.

"As hospitals have continued to expand, their overall employment has increased by about 3 percent per year since 2000, with the vast majority of the growth in private facilities," the report said. "Private employment alone increased by 65 percent between 2000 and 2015."

Alaska Airlines to build \$40M hangar in Anchorage

Annie Zak; August 2nd, 2016

Alaska Airlines announced Friday it will build a new \$40 million airplane maintenance hangar in Anchorage.

Construction will start in the fall and is scheduled for completion in the second quarter of 2018.

The 105,000-square-foot hangar will be on the east side of Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport. Seattle-based Alaska Airlines hired Anchorage architectural firm McCool Carlson Green for the project and general contractor Kiewit to build the facility, the airline said in a news release.

Alaska Airlines said it is upgrading its facilities as it grows and adds larger planes to its fleet.

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Marilyn Romano, Alaska regional vice president for the airline, said in an email Kiewit expects there will be about 150 workers on the project at peak construction.

The hangar will be able to house two 737-Max 9 aircraft, which will be the longest and widest plane in the Alaska Airlines fleet, the company said.

The project is part of a nearly [\\$100 million investment Alaska Airlines is making in Alaska](#), which also includes revamping 11 rural Alaska airport terminals and adding three all-freighter aircraft to its fleet.

Alaska Airlines to revamp its rural Alaska airport terminals

Annie Zak; March 12th, 2016 – updated September 30th, 2016

Alaska Airlines is about to spruce up and in some cases overhaul the 11 airport terminal facilities it owns across rural Alaska.

The Seattle-based company will put at least \$30 million into a three- to five-year project starting this year which will majorly remodel a few of its terminals -- in Kotzebue, Kodiak and Barrow -- and give more minor facelifts to the others.

A need to expand some of the terminals came from a growing Transportation Security Administration presence at the airports, said Joe Sprague, senior vice president of communications at Alaska Airlines.

"In the years since 9/11 ... there's just more space taken up by screening equipment than there used to be" said Sprague. "We need to make changes at some locations to better accommodate TSA, and for customers."

In many small rural airport terminals, people already don't have much space to regroup after going through security, he said. At some airports, passengers go directly from screening through a door to board the flight.

To fix that, the company is going to build larger waiting areas beyond security at some locations, with Barrow, Kotzebue and Kodiak "getting a more significant remodel to the layout," Sprague said.

"(There will be) a place to wait, put their belongings back together after screening, and depending on where boarding process is, get through security and get that done even if it hasn't started to board," he said.

The company doesn't yet have details about every terminal involved in the project, which is still in the planning stage.

Some remodels, such as at the Barrow terminal, will also improve the flow between arriving and departing passengers, which currently creates a "mishmash" of people, he said.

All of the airports will get at least subtle cosmetic changes, like signage and ticket counter backdrops replaced to reflect Alaska Airlines' [recent updates to its brand](#), and new paint jobs.

Modest changes at some of the airports will start this year in Cordova and Yakutat, and the remodels of Kodiak and Kotzebue are set to begin in 2017. Work on the Barrow airport will start "over the next couple years," Sprague said.

The project is part of a [broader three-part investment](#) Alaska Airlines is making in the state. The company is spending \$50 million on construction of a new hangar in Anchorage and [replacing its five combination passenger-cargo](#) (or "combi") planes with three all-freighter aircraft, which are in the process of being converted from passenger aircraft.

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"We really view those internally ... as one sort of overall effort to really re-invest in the state of Alaska," Sprague said. "The whole thing is probably reaching \$100 million. At a time when the oil and gas companies are reducing their footprints in the state of Alaska, we want folks to know we're very committed to the state."

Marilyn Romano, the company's regional vice president for Alaska, said Alaska Airlines also wanted to make the changes because of how crucial air transportation is in many of the state's far-flung communities.

"A lot of these airports are gathering areas," she said. "They wait and spend time in our terminals, so it's really important to us to make sure that we have a place that's welcoming."

While revamping the remote terminals is estimated to cost at least \$30 million, in reality it will likely end up costing quite a bit more, Sprague said.

One thing that will make some of the construction efforts difficult is the fact that, of these 11 airports, only one is accessible by road -- that's Deadhorse. That makes shipping construction materials difficult and expensive. In some of the colder locations, construction will only happen during the summer.

Alaska Airlines recently had one of its [best financial years ever](#), netting \$848 million in 2015.

The company owns and operates airport terminal facilities in Nome, Bethel, Kotzebue, Kodiak, Barrow, Deadhorse, Cordova, Yakutat, Gustavus, Petersburg and Wrangell.

Beverage distributor Odom Corp. to build \$40M Anchorage facility

Annie Zak; August 16th, 2016 – updated August 17th, 2016

Beverage distributor Odom Corp. will build a \$40 million warehouse and office facility in an industrial area near West International Airport Road, consolidating its Anchorage operations, the company said Tuesday.

Groundbreaking is scheduled for this fall and construction will take about two years, Executive Vice President Bill Odom said at a press conference Tuesday. As part of the construction, the Municipality of Anchorage has committed \$500,000 to upgrade a stretch of Electron Drive that runs by the property, which sits just south of a Chugach Electric power plant.

"There's cycles to the economy in Alaska, we've been through good times and bad times, ups and downs," Odom said. "They say it's on its way down, but it'll turn around, it'll come back, and then we'll have a building to handle that business."

Bellevue, Washington-based Odom, which distributes beer, wine, liquor, soft drinks and other beverages, is moving from its other Anchorage locations to make business more efficient. Right now, its operations are split between several buildings.

The city is piggybacking on Odom's project through what's called an "improvement of public place" agreement. As a result, fixing up the road will be much cheaper for the city than the estimated \$1.25 million to \$1.5 million it would have cost to do the work on its own.

Chris Schutte, director of the city's Office of Economic and Community Development, said the stretch of Electron Drive "needs to be brought up to municipal standards."

Schutte said traffic on the road has already increased because of the Chugach facility and because of nearby connections to other businesses, "and that road is not anticipated to be able to withstand the additional truck traffic that will come with the Odom facility."

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That \$500,000 for road improvements will come from excess bond capital, Schutte said.

Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz used Odom's plans as an example of businesses that aren't backing down from investment in a challenging time for the state's economy.

"This is a time for us to be bullish on the state," he said. "If you believe in where Alaska is going, if you have confidence in what Anchorage can be, now is the time to invest. ... This is a statement of what we can do, why we shouldn't be afraid of the current economic predicament, because it's really an economic opportunity."

Odom echoed the sentiment.

"Frankly, maybe building now, you might get a better deal," he said. "There may be some contractors out there that are a little hungry."

Odom Corp. has about 400 employees in the state, and about 350 of those are in Anchorage. The company isn't currently planning to hire more.

The new building will be comprised of about 200,000 square feet of warehouse space, Odom said, with additional space for offices.

The beverage distributor bought the 37-acre lot — which used to be a concrete and asphalt transfer site — two years ago. The company will also sell or lease part of the lot.

Odom currently leases space at 1800 Ship Ave. and another connected building, and owns property at 240 W. First Ave., which it will look to sell.