

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

SEAN PARNELL, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 110693
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-0693
PHONE: (907) 465-3250
FAX: (907) 465-1398

February 26, 2010

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senate
709 Senate Hart Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Subject: Alaska Medicare Clinic Support Capital Request

Dear Senator Murkowski:

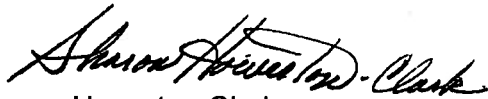
Upon careful review of their business plan and in meeting with Dr. George Rhyneer about the proposed Alaska Medicare Clinic, the Alaska Commission on Aging is pleased to offer our support for the \$500,000 federal capital request for start-up funds that would be matched with State funds to open a new Anchorage medical clinic that would provide a medical home for seniors insured by Medicare who are unable to access primary care. According to their business plan, the Alaska Senior Clinic would serve up to 50 patients a day utilizing an inter-disciplinary health care team comprised of a physician, nurse practitioner, and mid-level medical providers with a single diagnosis protocol model. In recent years, seniors living in Anchorage, the Mat-Su Borough, and Fairbanks have reported difficulty finding primary care physicians who will accept Medicare patients because of Medicare's low reimbursement rates.

Anchorage is home to more than 20,000 older Alaskans age 65 years and older, many of whom are Medicare beneficiaries who experience difficulty in finding a doctor. Of the seventy-five primary care physicians who practice in Anchorage, only thirteen report seeing new patients under the Medicare system (UA Institute of Social and Economic Research, March 2009). The Alaska Senior Clinic has the potential to complement the senior health care services currently provided by the Anchorage Neighborhood Health Clinic, which saw more than twice as many Medicare patients in 2007 as in 2001. If successful, the model for the Alaska Senior Clinic may be implemented in other physician shortage areas of the state, along with Community Health Centers, to increase the availability of primary care services for seniors and others insured by Medicare who are now underserved.

Alaska continues to lead all states in the rate of growth of people age 65 and older; they number 52,260 according to 2009 estimates from the Department of Labor. In 2005, there were 41,469 persons age 65 and older enrolled in the Medicare program, according to the Department of Health and Social Services (Alaska Health Care Data Book, 2007). Not only are Alaska seniors growing in number but they are living longer, many with chronic medical conditions and physical disabilities, requiring more health care. At the same time, Alaska has a growing shortage of primary care doctors as many providers are preparing to retire.

The ACoA supports the capital request for start-up funds for the Alaska Medicare Clinic to improve access to primary health care for older Alaskan Medicare beneficiaries. Limited access to primary care puts older persons at greater risk of developing serious health conditions that could have been abated with timely medical care. Many older Alaskans are struggling to keep up with the rising costs of health care, which threatens their health and financial security, and they cannot afford to pay for services out-of-pocket in order to receive primary care from doctors who refuse Medicare's low reimbursement rates. Alaska seniors contribute nearly \$2 billion to the State's economy from their retirement and healthcare spending in addition to their volunteer time - so we want to keep them here. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (907-465-4879), should you have any questions regarding our position. Thank you, Senator Murkowski, for your help securing the federal match.

Sincerely,



Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director
