

# Alaska Hospital & Healthcare Association

## Legislative Summary & Policy Overview | 2021-2022



Photos: Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, Alaska Regional Hospital, Petersburg Medical Center

**We are the leading voice for Alaska healthcare.  
We are the Alaska Hospital & Healthcare Association.**

The Alaska Hospital & Healthcare Association (AHHA) is committed to creating and maintaining a financial and regulatory environment that supports Alaska's hospitals, nursing homes, and health care partners - essential anchors within our communities that provide care and jobs, and drive the local economy. This work involves collaborating with members, policymakers, and other healthcare partners in advocating for the top priorities of AHHA members.

### AHHA Navigates a Successful Year for Healthcare

AHHA worked tirelessly with members on key legislative successes during year two of the 32nd legislative session.

Together, we:

- Secured a rate increase to the General Relief Assisted Living Program
- Passed telehealth expansion legislation
- Opened the door for crisis stabilization services across Alaska
- Successfully fought for a fully funded Medicaid budget
- Stopped Certificate of Need repeal
- Engaged thoughtfully on numerous healthcare issues

# Major Wins

## Medicaid

AHHA reminded policy makers that Medicaid is a sound investment. Alaska appropriates less general fund dollars to Medicaid today than it did 10 years ago despite providing coverage to 114,000 more Alaskans. AHHA worked hard for the fully-funded Medicaid budget that passed this year—representing a 7.3% general fund increase over the prior year, including the full restoration of cuts from SFY 2022 and a modest increase to the program.

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## Behavioral Health

AHHA noted that 128,000 emergency room visits in Alaska were associated with behavioral health last year. The Crisis Now model in other states shows that for every 100 calls, only 10 require a physical visit. With these demonstrated results, AHHA strongly supported the passage of HB 172, paving the way for the implementation of crisis stabilization services in Alaska.

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## Telehealth

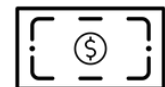
AHHA asked the simple question: in the age of mobile devices and technology, why not continue telehealth innovations from the pandemic for efficient access to care? AHHA worked with legislators to substantially shape HB 265—Alaska’s telehealth expansion bill—assisting with one of the most meaningful healthcare reform efforts becoming law.

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## General Relief

AHHA walked legislators through a complex analysis of Alaska’s General Relief Assisted Living Program, making the case for what will now be a 54.8% increase in funding for the program and the first rate increase to providers in 20 years. This was a major win for our hospitals and post-acute providers as it is a key step for supporting placements into more appropriate care settings.



# Key Senate Bills Tracked in 2022

## **SB 26 Repeal Certificate of Need**

*Sponsors:* Senators Wilson, Costello, Hughes, Reinbold, Holland, Shower

*Summary:* Seeks to repeal Alaska's certificate of need laws.

*Member Impact:* SB 26 seemed to attract support and started to move quickly in the Senate. Out-of-state think tanks were used to advertise the alleged policy benefits of CON repeal.

*AHHA Position:* Strongly oppose

*Outcome:* Did not pass, died in Finance

## **SB 67 Nurse Licensure Compact**

*Sponsors:* Senate Rules, Governor

*Summary:* Seeks to have Alaska join a multistate nurse licensure compact with 33 other states to adopt a single nursing license with uniform qualifications and practice expectations.

*Member Impact:* Enactment of the multistate nurse licensure compact has been one of AHHA's top priorities for years to streamline the nurse licensure process. Labor influence and unfounded arguments about oversight and sovereignty have been consistent headwinds.

*AHHA Position:* Strongly support (wrote letters and testified.)

*Outcome:* SB 67 was voted down in the Senate Health and Social Services Committee in 2021 and had no action in 2022.

## **SB 45 Raise minimum age to purchase, sell, exchange, or possess nicotine products; tax electronic smoking products**

*Sponsors:* Senator Stevens, Representatives Hannan, Josephson

*Summary:* The bill aligns state law with federal law in raising the minimum age to buy, sell or possess tobacco and electronic smoking products (ESPs) from age 19 to 21; and to include ESPs under the wholesale tax structure in existence for other tobacco products.

*Member Impact:* No specific impact on members.

*AHHA Position:* Support for public health impact

*Outcome:* Passed

## **SB 93 All-Payer Claims Database**

*Sponsors:* Senate Rules, Governor

*Summary:* Seeks to establish an all-payer claims database within the Alaska Division of Insurance. AHHA had been working with legislators in the House on an APCD compromise bill in 2021 and the Governor introduced a separate APCD bill (SB 93) to take advantage of federal startup funds.

*Member Impact:* Little impact since claims come from insurers not providers.

*AHHA Position:* Monitor

*Outcome:* Did not pass. The bill did not have any hearings or action in 2022.

## **SB 80 Youth Mental Health Education**

*Sponsors:* Senators Gray-Jackson, Begich; Representative Josephson

*Summary:* Allows school districts to provide age-appropriate mental health education for Alaska's students. Does not mandate anything specific to be provided.

*Member Impact:* Would offer additional supports to parents, reduce stigma surrounding mental health, and promote resilience within children and youth.

*AHHA Position:* Support (wrote letter)

*Outcome:* Passed Senate and made it to House floor. Concern over amendments resulted in bill not passing



Photo: SEARHC

# Key House Bills Tracked in 2022

## **HB 132 Expand School Apprenticeship Programs**

*Sponsors:* House Labor & Commerce

*Summary:* Seeks to support policies to provide opportunities for participation in concurrent vocational education, training, and on-the-job trade experience programs.

*Member Impact:* AHHA supports building and expanding apprenticeship programs to advance Alaska's workforce, especially in the healthcare sector.

*AHHA Position:* Support (wrote letter)

*Outcome:* Did not pass, passed the House in 2021 but no action in 2022

## **HB 145 Expand Pharmacist Authority**

*Summary:* Defines the patient care services that pharmacists can independently provide; allows pharmacist technicians to administer vaccines when under the direct supervision of a licensed pharmacist; and empowers the Board of Pharmacy to regulate pharmacists, student pharmacists, and pharmacy support staff who provide these services.

*Member Impact:* Allows increased patient care to be provided by pharmacists.

*AHHA Position:* Support (wrote letter)

*Outcome:* Passed

## **HB 172/ SB 124 Crisis Now - Mental Health Facilities**

*Sponsors:* Rules Governor

*Summary:* Seeks to increase availability of services designed to stabilize individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis by allowing for the use of 23-hour crisis stabilization centers and short-term crisis residential centers.

*Member Impact:* Enables the provision of crisis stabilization services by hospitals and partners.

*AHHA Position:* Support (wrote letter and provided testimony)

*Outcome:* Signed into law.

## **HB 176 Direct Health Agreements: Not Insurance**

*Sponsors:* Representatives Rasmussen, McCabe, Nelson, Fields

*Summary:* Seeks to allow direct health agreements with a primary care provider in exchange for payment of a periodic fee with the specification that these agreements do not equate to insurance. This bill has the support of Americans for Prosperity.

*Member Impact:* Considered concept; unclear whether there could be an adverse impact.

*AHHA Position:* No formal position.

*Outcome:* Did not pass

## **HB 252 Patient Visitation Rights**

*Sponsors:* Representatives Vance, Tilton, Rasmussen, Carpenter, Eastman, Kaufman, Rauscher, Gillham, Tuck, McCabe, Shaw, McKay, McCarty, Kurka

*Summary:* Bill would require facilities to allow patients to have a support person present during treatment and stays.

*Member Impact:* After reviewing the proposed bill, the Oklahoma Law, and the federal CoPs, AHHA drafted revised language for consideration by Rep. Vance that was workable for facilities and was aligned with existing CMS requirements.

*AHHA Position:* Neutral or support with proposed changes

*Outcome:* Did not pass and did not receive any hearings.



Photo: Providence Alaska

# Key House Bills Tracked in 2022

## **HB 265 Telehealth Access**

*Sponsors:* Representatives Spohnholz, Gillham, Mccarty, Rasmussen, Schrage, Ortiz, Tarr, Merrick, Fields, Story, Hannan, Drummond, Josephson, Patkotak, Nelson, Lebon, Mccabe, Foster Senators Wilson, Kiehl

*Summary:* Removes unnecessary barriers and site limitations to telehealth and improves access to out-of-state providers for established patients. The bill expands telehealth modalities and provides payment for telehealth services by the Medicaid program.

*Member Impact:* Without HB265, Alaskans would risk losing expanded telehealth access when the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency expires.

*AHHA Position:* Support (collaborated with stakeholders on changes and advocacy.)

*Outcome:* Passed. Effective immediately

## **HB292 Home & Community Based Services**

*Sponsors:* Representatives Snyder, Story, Fields, Tarr

*Summary:* Takes steps to ensure that Alaskans who need in-home care receive it, so they may live with dignity and independence at home, while providing more stability to caregivers. This bill would have raised the threshold for reduction of benefits and ensured that benefit recipients are notified of eligibility assessment results and their options for appeal.

*Member Impact:* Improve home and community based services which can help with discharges from facilities.

*AHHA Position:* Support

*Outcome:* Did not pass

## **HB308 Dementia Awareness**

*Sponsors:* Representatives Stutes, Story, McKay, Fields, Rasmussen, Kaufman, Tuck, Schrage, Josephson, Thompson, McCarty, Cronk, Ortiz, Tarr.

*Senators* Kiehl, Costello, Hughes, Kawasaki, Holland, Begich, Bishop, Olson, Micciche, Gray-Jackson

*Summary:* Directs the Department of Health to address Alzheimer's and Related Dementias with a public health approach. This approach will increase early detection and diagnosis, reduce risk, and prevent avoidable hospitalization. This bill provides support for dementia caregivers and establishes a position in the Section of Chronic Disease & Health Promotion to coordinate the effort and apply for federal grant funding.

*Member Impact:* Additional resources and support could help to increase early detection and diagnosis and improve care for people with dementia.

*AHHA Position:* Support (wrote letter)

*Outcome:* Passed. Effective immediately

## **HB392 APRN Scope of Practice for End of Life**

*Sponsors:* Representatives Snyder, Rauscher, Kurka, Tarr, Tilton, Rasmussen

*Summary:* Expands choice of health care providers for end-of-life planning and care. Specifically, the bill allows Advanced Practice Registered Nurses and Physician Assistants to sign Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) and POLST (Portable Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) orders along with death certificates.

*Member Impact:* Supports implementation of POLST and improves options for patient counseling on end-of-life care.

*AHHA Position:* Support (wrote letter)

*Outcome:* Passed



Photo: Alaska Native Medical Center