

State of Alaska
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Sarah Palin, Governor

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SeniorCare Program

Governor Sarah Palin's 2007 legislation:

- **Extend the SeniorCare program for 5 years:** Governor Palin's legislation will continue the \$120 SeniorCare monthly cash supplement for low-income seniors for five years — through June 30, 2012. This provides continued income support to low income seniors and will allow time to evaluate the fiscal impact of SeniorCare, and potentially the continued phase out of the Alaska Longevity Bonus program.
- **Change the income eligibility:** Governor Palin's legislation ties the eligibility to 135 percent of the annual federal poverty income guidelines for Alaska. This would set the program qualifications in 2007 at an income of \$17,240 for a single senior and \$23,112 for a couple. The asset qualification requirements would remain the same: these seniors can qualify with liquid assets of up to \$6,000 for an individual and \$9,000 for a couple.

Currently, the program's eligibility is frozen at 135 percent of the 2005 federal poverty level. The 2005 limits have caused some seniors to become ineligible for the program because of cost of living adjustments that are given to retirement and pension income, such as Social Security benefits.

- **Eligible seniors will be provided a choice between enrolling in SeniorCare or the Alaska Longevity Bonus:** If seniors receiving SeniorCare previously received the Alaska Longevity Bonus, they will have a choice between receiving SeniorCare or the Alaska Longevity Bonus, should the Longevity Bonus be funded by the Alaska legislature.
 - DHSS estimates that if the Alaska Longevity Bonus program is reinstated, that about 5,000 Alaska seniors will continue to receive SeniorCare, the remainder would choose to receive the Longevity Bonus.
- **End the Prescription Drug Benefit.** The SeniorCare prescription drug payment assistance, which has had very small enrollment, will end. A recent survey by the Department of Health and Social Services found that many seniors have other insurance coverage.

In January 2006, the SeniorCare program expanded with the Prescription Drug Payment Assistance component aimed at helping qualified seniors pay insurance premiums and deductibles. The program was expected to serve 4,000 seniors but never topped the 200 mark. In December 2006, DHSS surveyed seniors about SeniorCare. The survey found many seniors have other insurance coverage. DHSS estimates one-third of the prescription drug program beneficiaries are former Alaska Longevity Bonus recipients who would be able to reapply for the Alaska Longevity Bonus if it is reinstated.

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SeniorCare History

- In 2003, the SeniorCare program began offering \$120 monthly cash assistance to low-income seniors. Last year the SeniorCare Cash program served about 7,000 out of about 45,000 senior Alaskans.
- The current eligibility level for SeniorCare is frozen at 135 percent of 2005 poverty levels (\$16,133/single, \$17,240/couple). Some seniors have become ineligible for the program as cost-of-living adjustments cause retirement and pension income, such as Social Security benefits, to rise with the federal poverty level.

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