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Healthy Alaskans 2020 releases state public health assessment

Report highlights strengths of state's system and areas for improvement

ANCHORAGE — The statewide collaborative initiative Healthy Alaskans 2020 released today the “Alaska’s Community Capacity Review: A Statewide Public Health System Assessment” in a report that highlights the strengths, gaps and opportunities for Alaska’s public health infrastructure.

A group of 79 people representing various organizations from all geographic regions of Alaska met in May to conduct the assessment. Its findings reveal strengths and areas of needed improvement in Alaska’s public health system. “This report helps us understand Alaska’s unique public health system and find the gaps it,” said Kerre Shelton, director of the Division of Public Health, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. “Now we can establish a common baseline for all partners within our public health system to measure progress as we develop a stronger, more integrated and effective public health system that reaches all Alaskans.”

Some of the strengths noted in the report include:

- Alaska rates above the national average in research and innovation.
- Alaska rates above the national average in the enforcement and regulation of public health-related laws.
- Alaska has strong partnerships between Tribal health, the Alaska Division of Public Health, and many private and nonprofit organizations.

Some of the areas that need improvement include:

- Alaska needs to expand its current work to better address the social determinants of health to impact the root causes of Alaska's health issues (alcohol and substance abuse, lack of affordable housing, poverty and education)
- Alaska can strengthen its public health system through increased performance management and quality improvement.
- Alaska needs to increase the professional expertise available to smaller communities.

The report will provide opportunities to implement Healthy Alaskans 2020, identify the gaps in Alaska's health care system that can be advanced through quality improvement, and provide guidance to stakeholders and policymakers.

Healthy Alaskans 2020 is sponsored by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Public Health Improvement Initiative. Healthy Alaskans 2020 provides a framework to support the work of partners and stakeholders statewide. The steps to building this framework have included completing this assessment, prioritizing 25 health objectives and targets for the decade, and identifying strategies and actions to reach those targets.