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PRESS RELEASE

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### **Alaska COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force submits draft vaccination plan to CDC**

October 20, 2020 ANCHORAGE – The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) submitted Alaska’s draft COVID-19 Vaccination Plan to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last Friday for review, as required for all states. The Alaska COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force prepared the document over the past several weeks as part of ongoing preparations for a safe and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccine across the state of Alaska.

The Alaska COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force is a partnership between DHSS and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC). As a national leader in Tribal health, ANTHC works in partnership with Tribal health organizations of the Alaska Tribal Health System.

Alaska’s Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anne Zink considers statewide trust and safety to be crucial components of the planning efforts. “We are closely watching the progress of clinical trials to ensure no steps are missed during the clinical trial and data review process. For any vaccine made available to Alaskans, safety will remain our top priority. The initial data looks promising, but we will continue to follow it carefully.”

“The Alaska Native Health Board appreciates DHSS recognizing the importance of collaboration with the Alaska Tribal Health System in taking an inclusive and coordinated approach in combating the COVID-19 pandemic and in the vaccination plan,” noted Alaska Native Health Board President and CEO Verné Boerner.

The Alaska COVID-19 Vaccination Task Force consists of eight teams, each co-led by ANTHC and DHSS personnel: planning, operations, software solutions, payers, pharmacy, communications and education, data, and a liaison team. This organization allows the task force to incorporate federal guidance and begin gathering relevant community perspectives in each domain.

“Even though we do not know when or what type of vaccine will be available, we do know that we want to be prepared. Submitting this plan to the CDC is just the first step in the planning process, and we expect to make changes as new information becomes available,” said Tessa Walker Linderman, DHSS lead for the task force.

The task force is regularly assessing and incorporating guidance from the CDC regarding vaccine access and prioritization. The COVID-19 vaccine is expected to be available in limited supply at first, and the CDC will provide recommendations on prioritization of initial supply. Populations with prioritized

access to the vaccine may include health care workers, staff and residents in long-term care and assisted living facilities, people at risk for severe COVID-19 illness, people at risk of acquiring or transmitting COVID-19, and critical infrastructure workers.

Key planning partners are preparing for vaccine availability, including the Alaska State Hospital & Nursing Home Association. President and CEO Jared C. Kosin stated, “We are in constant communication with leaders from Alaska’s hospitals and nursing homes so that we will all be ready for distribution of a vaccine to caregivers on the front lines. Our health care heroes continue to lead us through this crisis and effective distribution of the vaccine will be crucial to moving beyond the pandemic.”

The task force has also begun to meet with local partners as they will play critical roles throughout the vaccine distribution process. Local planning teams will engage many key pharmacy, vaccine provider, and point of dispensing (POD) partners, as well as being in position to capitalize on strengths at the community level and communicate about their areas of need.

Matt Bobo, manager of the Alaska Immunization Program stated, “The plan highlights how the Alaska Immunization Program will use our existing vaccine provider network and accountability systems to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine. Though there are unique considerations for the COVID-19 vaccine, our program already works with over 200 health care organizations to prevent and control vaccine-preventable disease in Alaska.” Health care facilities that wish to provide the vaccine will be able to enroll in a COVID-19 vaccine program, which is expected to open for enrollment in the coming weeks.

The draft plan and more information on Alaska’s COVID-19 vaccination planning can be found on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Information webpage](#). a direct link to the plan can be found [here](#).

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