

# Alaska

## I. Government Funded Indigent Care

### A. General Assistance

Alaska maintains a system of state funded general relief benefits that includes financial assistance for medical needs, including, but not limited to, hospitalization, nursing, and convalescent care.<sup>1</sup> Under Alaska statutes, the provision of general relief is discretionary rather than mandatory: state officials may provide assistance to the needy, so far as practicable under the conditions in the state.<sup>2</sup>

To be eligible for state funded medical care under general relief, an individual must (1) be a citizen or legal resident of the United States,<sup>3</sup> (2) have monthly family income that falls below certain thresholds,<sup>4</sup> and (3) lack resources from which medical services or payment for medical services might be obtained, including Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance, or personal or real property.<sup>5</sup> Non-disabled individuals between the ages of 18 and 59 must register for work with the Alaska Department of Labor as a condition of receiving benefits, unless they are incapacitated, attending high school full-time or are needed at home to care for an incapacitated relative.<sup>6</sup> Ordinarily, general relief is only available to individuals who are 18 years or older and to minors who are living apart from their parents and are managing their own financial affairs.<sup>7</sup> However, general relief will pay for therapeutic abortions for minors living at home, regardless of family income.<sup>8</sup>

General relief is a program of last resort. Aid is limited to state residents who are ineligible for assistance from another public agency or department providing similar services in the state.<sup>9</sup> Residents of public institutions, other than patients in public medical institutions or in public or private institutions for

---

<sup>1</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.25.120 et seq.

<sup>2</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.25.120

<sup>3</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.140(5).

<sup>4</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.150.

<sup>5</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.160.

<sup>6</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.140(b).

<sup>7</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.170(a).

<sup>8</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.170(b).

<sup>9</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.25.300(3).

tuberculosis or mental disease, are excluded from benefits.<sup>10</sup>

The general relief medical program covers :

- (1) non-elective, inpatient hospital services that cannot be performed on an outpatient basis and have been certified as necessary by the peer review organization that contracts with Alaska's Medicaid agency;
- (2) skilled nursing home care;
- (3) intermediate nursing home care;
- (4) physicians services related to
  - (a) covered inpatient hospital care,
  - (b) emergency room care that leads to a covered inpatient admission,
  - (c) nursing home care,
  - (d) therapeutic abortion, or
  - (e) cancer, terminal illness, or another chronic illness that if untreated, would lead to death or disability;
- (5) outpatient laboratory and x-ray services provided in conjunction with therapeutic abortion or nursing home care;
- (6) medical transportation related to covered inpatient hospital care, nursing home care, or therapeutic abortion;
- (7) outpatient surgical center services provided in conjunction with therapeutic abortion or nursing home care; and
- (8) prescribed drugs and medical supplies for a recipient suffering from cancer, terminal illness, diabetes, seizure disorder, chronic mental illness or hypertension.<sup>11</sup>

These medical services are subject to the same limits placed on the amount, duration, and scope of services provided under the Medicaid program.<sup>12</sup> In addition, payment is limited to no more than twelve physicians visits and no more than eight inpatient days per year.<sup>13</sup> General relief pays for no more than \$50 per day for a maximum of \$200 for inpatient services provided at a hospital.<sup>14</sup>

Individuals who need long-term medical or rehabilitative care services that could appropriately be provided in a skilled nursing facility or an intermediate care facility may apply for a waiver of income and resource rules and general relief service limits.<sup>15</sup> The state may waive income limits upon a showing that

---

<sup>10</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.25.140.

<sup>11</sup>Id. The department may enter into competitively awarded group service agreements with providers and may require needy persons to obtain these services from designated providers. Alaska Stats. § 47.25.130(b).

<sup>12</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.200.

<sup>13</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.245.

<sup>14</sup>Id.

<sup>15</sup>7 Alaska Adm. Code § 47.280.

because of unusual circumstances, the eligibility criteria do not accurately reflect the patient's financial needs. The state may waive service limits upon a showing that the state's cost will not increase if a waiver is granted.

State statutes establish priorities for elimination of general relief services in the event of budget shortfalls. If the Department of Health and Social Services finds that the costs of general relief medical assistance for all persons eligible for such benefits will exceed the amount allocated in the state budget for that assistance for the fiscal year, the department must eliminate coverage for medical services in the following order: (1) treatment of speech, hearing and language disorders; (2) optometrists' services and eyeglasses; (3) occupational therapy; (4) emergency dental services for adults; (5) prosthetic devices not including dentures; (6) medical supplies and equipment; (7) physical therapy; (8) outpatient laboratory and outpatient x-ray services; (9) ambulatory surgical center services; (10) non emergency medical transportation; (11) outpatient physician services; (12) outpatient hospital services; (13) intermediate care facility services; (14) skilled nursing facility services; (15) emergency medical transportation; (16) pharmaceuticals; (17) inpatient physician services; and (18) inpatient hospital services.<sup>16</sup>

#### B. Temporary and Discretionary Assistance

The Department of Health and Social Services has broad powers to aid indigent persons who do not meet eligibility criteria established for general relief. The Department may provide needy persons who are not entitled to general relief assistance and have no relatives in the state liable for their support with temporary assistance in the form and amount that it considers necessary.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the Department is authorized to provide "discretionary" assistance to needy individuals who are ineligible for assistance.<sup>18</sup>

#### D. Catastrophic Illness Assistance

In 1978, the Alaska enacted legislation authorizing the creation of a Catastrophic Illness Assistance Program. However, the Alaska legislature has failed to fund this program. If implemented, the Department of Health and Social Services would reimburse providers of medical care for unpaid costs incurred in the treatment of a person suffering an illness or accident that resulted in financial catastrophe to the person or the person's family.<sup>19</sup> For the purpose of this program, catastrophic illness means illness or injury that results in medical expenses of over \$1,000 during a 12 month period, after all other sources of third-party payment have been exhausted.<sup>20</sup> Applicants would be required to make sliding scale payments towards the costs of this care, which would vary depending upon the applicant's gross income, the number of dependents, the amount of the applicant's assets, and the amount of third party payments

---

<sup>16</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.25.205.

<sup>17</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.25.250.

<sup>18</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.25.252.

<sup>19</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.08.010.

<sup>20</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.08.140(3).

for the applicant's care.<sup>21</sup>

Reimbursement would be available for any financial obligation incurred in the course of treatment of illness as prescribed by a physician, including bills for ancillary services, patient transportation, transportation of a medical or family escort when reasonably necessary, or living expenses while receiving outpatient treatment in a community to which the applicant is not reasonably able to commute from the applicant's permanent place of abode.<sup>22</sup> The program would not cover: (1) dentistry or optometry that is not prescribed by a licensed dentist or physician as medically necessary as a result of illness or injury; (2) elective medical or surgical procedures; (3) drugs or prescriptions that are not prescribed by a physician; (4) normal pregnancy and childbirth; (5) private mental health and substance abuse services, unless such services are unavailable from public facilities; (6) chiropractic services; (7) naturopathy; (8) non-medical services; and (9) medical services provided to prisoners.<sup>23</sup>

#### E. Assistance to Hospitals and Health Facilities

Alaska statutes authorize the Department of Health and Social Services to aid non-profit hospitals and community health facilities in purchasing, constructing, and repairing necessary equipment.<sup>24</sup> The Department may also provide grants to community operated nonprofit hospitals, clinics and community health centers to enable them to meet operating deficits.<sup>25</sup>

#### F. Public Health

Alaska like most states, provides a range of services to its residents through state and local public health programs. State law authorizes the Department of Health and Social Services to pay for the costs of tuberculosis treatment and incidental expenses for state residents, as well as temporary care and transportation for non-residents suffering from tuberculosis.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the Department of Health and Social Services is charged with administering communicable disease control programs, maternal and child health programs, programs for the care of crippled children, and other programs that promote and protect the public health.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup>Alaska Stats § 47.08.060. However, the patients

<sup>22</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.08.140(8).

<sup>23</sup>Alaska Stats. § 47.08.050.

<sup>24</sup>Alaska Stats §§ 18.25.010 and 18.25.070

<sup>25</sup>Alaska Stats. § 18.25.040.

<sup>26</sup>Alaska Stats. § 18.15.120(7).

<sup>27</sup>Alaska Stats. § 18.05.010.