ANHB UPDATE

November 20, 2026

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STATE UPDATES

Alaska Submits Traditional Healing 1115 Application to CMS
On November 6, the Alaska Department of Health submitted Alaska's Traditional Health Care Practices 1115 waiver application to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for federal review. The federal public comment period is open from November 9 to December 9, 2026. If approved, the waiver would allow Tribal Traditional Healing services to be recognized and covered under Alaska Medicaid, a significant step forward for sustainability of these services. ANHB submitted a letter strongly supporting the 1115 application during the state-level public comment period, and applauds the application's submission to CMS.

Alaska Senate Majority Coalition Announces Committee Chairs for the 35th Alaska Legislature
On November 12, the Alaska Senate Majority announced committee chairs for the 35th Alaska Legislature, which will take place from 2027-2029. Committee chairs are:

- **Community & Regional Affairs:** Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
- **Education:** Senator Löki Tobin
- **Health & Social Services:** Co-Chair Senator Forrest Dunbar, Co-Chair Senator Löki Tobin
- **Finance:** Co-Chair Senator Jesse Kiehl, Co-Chair Senator-elect Bryce Edgmon
- **Judiciary:** Senator Matt Claman
- **Labor & Commerce:** Senator Forrest Dunbar
- **Resources:** Co-Chair Senator Cathy Giessel, Co-Chair Senator-elect Louise Stutes
- **State Affairs:** Senator Gray-Jackson
- **Transportation:** Senator-elect Louise Stutes
- **Legislative Budget & Audit:** Vice-Chair Senator Elvi Gray-Jackson
- **Legislative Council:** Senator Matt Claman
- **Joint Armed Services:** Co-Chair Senator Scott Kawasaki

Alaska Legislature Announces Leadership for 35th Legislature
Following the November 3 election, the Alaska Senate and House majority coalitions have both announced their leadership for the 35th Legislature, which will take place in 2027-29. The 2027 Legislative Session is scheduled for January 19 – May 19, 2027.

Senate Leadership:

- Senate President – Senator Cathy Giessel, R-Anchorage
- Majority Leader – Senator-elect Louise Stutes, R-Kodiak
- Rules Chair – Senator Bill Wielechowski, D-Anchorage
- Finance Chair – Senator Jesse Kiehl, D-Juneau
- Finance Chair – Senator-elect Bryce Edgmon, I-Dillingham

2026 Meeting Dates

December 1-2, 2026
Tribal Behavioral Health Director's Quarterly Meeting
Virtual

December 2, 2026
ANTHC Annual Meeting
Anchorage, AK

December 8-10, 2026
ANHB Annual Meeting & IHS Budget Formulation
Anchorage, AK

December 15, 2026
Tribal Leaders Diabetes Committee
Virtual

2027 Meeting Dates

February 9-11, 2027
ANHB Mega Meeting
Juneau, AK

March 23-24, 2027
ATHC Pre-Negotiations
Anchorage, AK

May 10-14, 2027
ATHC Final Negotiations
Anchorage, AK

House Leadership:

- Speaker – Rep. Calvin Schrage (NP-Anchorage)
- Rules Chair – Rep. Rebecca Himschoot (I-Sitka)
- Majority Leader – Rep. Chuck Kopp (R-Anchorage)
- Finance Co-Chair, Operating Budget – Rep. Sara Hannan (D-Juneau)
- Finance Co-Chair, Capital Budget – Rep. Ashley Carrick (D-Fairbanks)
- Finance Co-Chair, Bills – Rep. Neal Foster (D-Nome)

Governor-Elect Kreiss-Tomkins Announces Transition Team
This week, Governor-elect Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins announced three leaders of his multipartisan transition team. The individuals include Fairbanks Republican and former state Senator Click Bishop, Bethel-born Democrat Ana Hoffman, and Anchorage independent Carol Gore. In the coming weeks, the team will lead the formation of the new administration, including hiring staff and setting policy priorities. Kreiss-Tomkins has also launched a new website, rebuildalaska.org, for the administration transition, including links for Alaskans to submit their ideas for the transition.

Rural Health Transformation Program Updates
The Alaska Department of Health (DOH) recently received its Year 2 Notice of Award for the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). In total, Alaska's Year 2 award amount is $272,653,149.35, an increase of $478,293.63 from Year 1. Grantee applications for RHTP Year Two, Fall 2026 funding cycle closed on October 28, 2026. DOH is currently assessing applications. Additionally, the Alaska Department of Health (DOH) opened registration for the RHTP Year Two statewide convening in Anchorage on January 6-7, 2027. Register via the RHTP webpage.

The RHTP Advisory Council met on November 16th. A meeting recording will be made available here.

FEDERAL UPDATES

CMS Announces Hold Harmless Period for H.R. 1 Community Engagement Implementation
On November 13, 2026, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced an optional hold harmless period through June 30, 2027, for H.R. 1 work and community engagement requirements. States that implement the hold harmless period will still assess whether individuals meet the work requirement or are excluded from it, but they will not deny applications or disenroll otherwise eligible individuals solely for failure to meet the requirement. The Alaska Department of Health has shared they are tracking this option and assessing next steps, including whether to update Alaska's

"good faith waiver" request to adopt the hold harmless period. The good faith waiver is currently awaiting CMS review.

Senate releases FY 2027 Interior Bill with Increases for IHS and Advance Appropriations for FY 2028
On November 12, 2026, the Senate Appropriations Full Committee released its Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 appropriations bill for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. The bill provides $8.40 billion for the Indian Health Service (IHS), a $353 million increase over the FY 2026 enacted level, including $5.39 billion in advance appropriations for FY 2028. The House Appropriations Committee previously passed its own FY 2027 appropriations bill. The House and Senate must now agree on final FY 2027 funding. The government is currently operating under a Continuing Resolution, which expires on December 11, 2026.

Trump Administration Announces Second Year Rural Health Transformation Program Awards
On November 9, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), announced $10 billion in awards to all 50 states for the second year of the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP). Alaska's award remains the second largest in the nation at $272.65 million.

CMS Final Rule Sets Policies for Medicare High-Cost Drug Negotiation
The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has issued a final rule establishing a permanent framework for negotiating prices of high-cost drugs. The final rule sets policies for the Medicare Drug Price Negotiation Program beginning with prices effective in 2029, providing greater predictability for participating manufacturers and supporting continued innovation. The rule finalizes a proposed policy regarding treatment of specific fixed combination drugs that CMS determines are new formulations of existing drugs.



ANHB Meets with CDC Director Erica Schwartz During Visit to Alaska

On October 27, ANHB met with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Erica Schwartz. Dr. Schwartz was confirmed in August 2026 and this was her first visit to Alaska in her role as CDC Director. Director Schwartz visited the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) in Bethel, met with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) and Southcentral Foundation (SCF), and toured the Alaska Native Medical Center while in Anchorage.



ANHB Hosts IHS Tribal Delegation Meeting with Director Cruz

On October 22, ANHB hosted a Tribal Delegation Meeting (TDM) with Indian Health Service (IHS) Director Mark Cruz. ANHB members raised topics including agency realignment, the budget formulation process, the Contract Support Cost Advisory Group, and facilities construction, and engaged in robust discussion. This was Director Cruz's first visit to Alaska in his new role. Director Cruz also attended and spoke at the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Annual Convention during his visit.

CMS Approves Traditional Healing 1115 Demonstration Waivers in Utah and Maine

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has approved Section 1115 demonstration waiver applications in Maine and Utah, authorizing Medicaid reimbursement for Tribal Traditional Health Care Practices in these states. Medicaid reimbursement provides a sustainable funding pathway for these services, allowing Tribes to strengthen and expand access to traditional healing practices. Additional traditional healing proposals remain under CMS consideration, including Minnesota's application and an application recently submitted by Washington. Alaska has recently opened public comment on its draft application, which has not yet been submitted to CMS.

IHS Updates Medicare Part D Creditable Coverage Letter
In an October 15, 2026 Dear Tribal Leader Letter (DTLL), Indian Health Service (IHS) Director Cruz announced that IHS has updated the Medicare Part D Creditable Coverage Letter to reflect the current Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services guidance confirming that prescription drug coverage provided through the IHS, Tribal Health Programs, and Urban Indian Organizations (I/T/U) is creditable coverage for Medicare Part D purposes. Read the full DTLL here.

GAO Issues Report on Tribal Water Infrastructure
The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) has completed a review of federal tribal water infrastructure assistance and released a public report. The report includes several recommendations to Congress, the Indian Health Service (IHS), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and other federal agencies. GAO conducted a site visit to Alaska as part of its review and met with ANHB membership in 2024. Read the full report and recommendations here.

OTHER UDPATES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

ANMC Ownership Reception: December 9, 2026
The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) will host a reception celebrating the historic transfer of the Alasa Native Medical Center (ANMC) to Tribal ownership. The reception will take place on December 9, 2026, from 5:00 – 7:00 p.m., at the ANTHC Consortium Office Building Atrium (4000 Ambassador Drive) in Anchorage. To support ANTHC's planning efforts, please RSVP here.

Book Your Travel: ANHB Mega Meeting in Juneau, February 9-11, 2027
The next ANHB Mega Meeting will take place in Juneau on February 9-11, 2027. Please be advised to book travel early, as this is a busy time in Juneau. Please reach out to anhb@anhb.org for any questions or advice on travel logistics for the meeting.

ANTHC Annual Meeting on December 2, 2026

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) Annual Meeting will take place on Wednesday, December 2, 2026, in person at the Anchorage Downtown Marriot and via Zoom. The event will feature a program open house, updates on ANTHC strategic plan development, and a patient feedback hour ahead of the annual meeting. Register here.

ANHB Welcomes Native Village of Chitina as Newest ANHB Member

ANHB is pleased to announce that the Native Village of Chitina has joined us as a new ANHB member organization. Located in the Copper River Basin, the Native Village of Chitina is a sovereign, federally recognized Tribe that partners with Southcentral Foundation to provide primary care services at the Chitina Community Clinic. ANHB welcomes the Native Village of Chitina as our newest ANHB member.

ANHB Workgroups

ANHB encourages participation in its workgroups. Please see below a list of current ANHB workgroups. If you would like yourself or someone from your team added to any of these workgroups, please let us know by emailing anhb@anhb.org.

- **Medicaid Task Force (MTF):** Convenes in May and October with the Alaska Department of Health (DOH) to address Medicaid issues and the Medicaid Open Items list.
- **Medicaid Eligibility Workgroup**: Monthly workgroup with the Alaska Department of Health to address the Medicaid application backlog, Division of Public Assistance (DPA) modernization, and related areas of concern.
- **Medicaid Travel Policy Workgroup**: Quarterly or ad-hoc workgroup with the Alaska Department of Health focused on Medicaid travel issues at the policy level.
- **Tribal CFO Workgroup**: Monthly or quarterly workgroup of Tribal CFOs and policy analysts regarding common issues including Appendix A.
- **Legislative Committee**: Develops ANHB's State and Federal policy priorities annually in fall and winter. Meets weekly during State Legislative Session to formulate ANHB advocacy strategies and build consensus on state and federal engagement.
- **Rural Health Transformation Program Workgroup**: Ad-hoc Tribal workgroup focused on shared concerns around the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP).
- **Village Built Clinic Workgroup**: Ad-hoc workgroup with the Indian Health Service (IHS) on funding for Village Built Clinics (VBCs).
- **HR 1 Workgroup**: Bi-weekly workgroup to share knowledge and build consensus around Tribal priorities related to the implementation of H.R. 1 and engage with the Alaska Department of Health.

- **Traditional Healing Workgroup**: Joint workgroup with the Alaska Department of Health on amendment of Alaska's 1115 waiver to allow for Traditional Healing services.

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