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VISIONS FOR THE ARCTIC



# Health Fairs and Preventive Screenings

## Saving Alaskans one test at time

By Tom Anderson

Everyone in Alaska has been affected by disease. Whether or not someone has suffered from a malady like cancer, heart disease, or diabetes, it's a guarantee that everyone has a friend or family member who has experienced, and even succumbed, to illness.

As insurance rates and healthcare costs rise, the healthcare industry is looking for straightforward ways to apprise the public of risks and prevention. Lowering the rate of disease is a key component to demonstrable healthcare delivery.

Fortunately for our state, there are myriad practitioners, hospitals, and nonprofit health associations dedicating time and resources to educate Alaskans on the most successful ways to prevent illness.

One such way to inform the masses, while spurring consistent lifestyle change and prevention, is through participation in health fairs and public events during which testing and information exchange can occur. Despite Alaska's size and demographic diversity, the opportunities these fairs and screenings afford to spread a message of hope is changing the longevity landscape for prospective patients.

### Alaska Health Fair

Alaska Health Fair (AHF), a nonprofit organization, offers organized, comprehensive health fairs with a variety of blood tests and preventive screenings. AHF has been promoting health fairs in the state for more than thirty-six years with a premise that education, screening, and wellness promotion will save lives.

"Our health fairs offer free health education, free screenings, and the most affordable comprehensive blood tests in Alaska. We deliver around one hundred health fairs annually statewide—in larger communities like Anchorage, Juneau, Fair-

## Top Reasons for a Smoke-Free Workplace

From the Alaska Health Fair August 2016 Newsletter

- ▶ Fresh air cigarette smoking is the No. 1 cause of poor health, disease, and death, costing the state of Alaska \$536 million dollars in direct medical costs and lost productivity. This amount does not include the health effects from second-hand and third-hand smoke exposure.
- ▶ Alaska is one of only sixteen states without a statewide smoke-free workplace law; 42 percent of the population is not protected from exposure to second-hand smoke in their workplaces.
- ▶ The United States smoking rate has declined by 50 percent in the last fifty years. However, targeted by the tobacco industry and exposed to second-hand smoke in low-wage jobs, the smoking rate for low-income people has not changed.
- ▶ According to the Centers for Disease Control, 29 percent of Medicaid recipients are smokers and Medicaid recipients smoke at two times the rate of people with private insurance. According to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 60 percent of the money spent to treat tobacco related illnesses in the United States was paid by government sources.
- ▶ It is estimated by the Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Annual Report that adopting a Smoke-Free Workplace law would save Medicaid in Alaska a \$500,000 dollars over five years.
- ▶ The most effective way to reduce smoking rates and smoking related illness is to adopt smoke-free workplace policies. Studies show that after adopting smoke-free workplace policies, rates of hospitalizations for heart attack, stroke, asthma, and lung disease were reduced by 15 percent to 20 percent almost immediately (Circulation. 2012;126:2177-2183).
- ▶ In addition, rates of preterm birth and babies born small decreased between 5 percent to 11 percent a year after country-wide smoke-free laws were adopted in Ireland and Scotland (PLoS Med. 2012;9:e1001175).
- ▶ Three hundred thousand dollars were saved over three years in a small town in Mississippi for the treatment of heart attacks only (ttac.org/resources/pdfs/120810\_Miss\_Heart\_Attack\_Report.pdf).
- ▶ While Germany saw a \$6.9 million, (20.1 percent) decrease in heart attack related hospitalization costs during the first year after smoke-free law implementation.
- ▶ Smoke-free workplaces save money and lives.
- ▶ Businesses interested in promoting smoke-free workplaces in your community, please contact Tobacco Prevention and Control at kcox@ncaddjuneau.org or the Alaska Lung Association at smokefreealaska.com. Or stop by the Quitline table at the Health Fairs.



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banks, and Bethel, and also in around thirty smaller communities,” says Executive Director Andrei Chakine. “We also deliver around twenty-five worksite health fairs for big and small employers from a variety of industries: oil and gas, financial services, transportation, and nonprofits. No other state has a dedicated nonprofit like Alaska Health Fair to provide affordable blood tests, free health screenings, and free health education on important topics on such a grand scale. And it’s all possible because of support from Alaska communities and organizations.”

Chakine believes the AHF’s efforts are making a big difference as fifteen thousand to twenty thousand people attend its events annually, and attendance numbers are growing as last spring and fall the organization added more than one thousand new clients.

One important question AHF continually seeks to answer is: Who attends its health fairs? Is it the prudent, health-conscious stalwart, the person already suffering from symptoms or pain, or perhaps someone who can’t afford a medical examination?

AHF took a recent survey of attendees after they departed an event and generated insight on who participates in a health fair or screening and why:

- ▶ **95 percent** of health fair attendees plan to follow up with a doctor if they learn of a health condition through screenings and tests received at AHF events.
- ▶ **59 percent** report they have health insurance. An additional 23 percent are covered through Medicaid/Medicare.
- ▶ **89 percent** report that after attending the health fair they gained a better understanding of ways to achieve healthier lifestyles and behaviors.

Chakine adds that a popular reason to attend an industry fair remains education on health and affordable blood tests and screening. “We work with PAML, one of the leading laboratories in the nation, to offer the most affordable comprehensive blood tests in Alaska. Our most popular comprehensive blood chemistry panel consisting of twenty-seven panels costs \$45. We are a nonprofit, and our pricing has not changed since 2003.”

As for the medical community, Chakine reminds that AHF “works with hundreds of medical professionals who volunteer thousands of hours at our events and come to our health fairs as exhibitors. It’s a great way for them to connect with their com-

munity, learn about a community’s health concerns, educate on important health topics, and even grow their practices. Exhibitor space is always free at our health fairs. Clinics and hospitals also refer their patients for blood testing to Alaska Health Fair.”

### Not just Nonprofits

St. Elias Specialty Hospital is a sixty-bed, long-term acute care facility in Anchorage. The hospital is a joint venture with Providence Health System and BridgeCare Hospitals. While the larger companies have their own notable comprehensive health fair and screening sponsorships in Alaska, St. Elias particularly engages in Southcentral Alaskan advocacy and health promotion.

The hospital’s management stresses intrinsic values like communication and education as primary drivers of its healthcare delivery protocols. To that end, health fairs and public awareness are foundations to the hospital’s services.

“Anytime St. Elias reaches out to educate and participate in preventative public screening opportunities in partnership with Alaskan physicians and facilities, we’re helping promote wellness in our communities,” notes Patti McGuire, St. Elias’s



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managing partner. “As medicine becomes increasingly complex and technical each year, the more our dedicated staff reaches out to simplify and explain health benefits and prevention measures, the better result for both patient and practitioner.”

McGuire says St. Elias is a frequent contributor to multiple charitable health fairs and awareness and community screening efforts annually, including the Alaska Women’s Run targeting breast cancer and the Alaska Women’s Summit centering on comprehensive medical coverage and screening for women in rural and urban centers across the state.

AHF’s Chakine adds that hospitals and staff can be integral in making a health fair and screening impactful to the public, noting Fairbanks Memorial Hospital and Bartlett Regional Hospital have substantively supported his organization.

Add to the mix the hundreds of dentists, medical and naturopathic doctors, optometrists, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants statewide who participate in health fairs, and the collective is expanding.

Take Larry Lawson, MD, and his Midnight Sun Oncology practice in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Positioned between Palmer and Wasilla, adjacent to Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, Lawson and partner Jose Suarez, MD, are the only practicing oncologists who reside and work in the Valley. They take that role seriously when it comes to public education about cancer and prevention.

“Health screening is the single most effective way to combat cancer,” says Lawson. “Our medical team promotes the importance of regular check-ups with patients’ medical providers, as well as age-appropriate gender-centric cancer screening for men and women. Health fairs and community screening opportunities are convenient and inexpensive, if not free of charge. Alaskans should definitely take advantage of the opportunity to get screenings and relevant information at health fairs.”

### Worksite Wellness

“Worksite wellness is very hot right now, which is understandable,” says Chakine. “Implementing wellness programs and internal fairs has many benefits for employers, big or small, including attracting talented workers, reducing absenteeism and turnovers, and improving productivity and morale.”

Chakine delineates the services AHF offers, which includes worksite health fairs tailored to help meet client organizations’ wellness goals. In partnership with other leading agencies (the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and local ex-

Upcoming Health Fair Schedule		
Southcentral		
Community	Date & Time	Event
Chugiak/Eagle River	10/1/16, 8am - Noon	Health Fair, Chugiak-Eagle River Senior Center, 22424 N. Birchwood Loop, Chugiak, AK 99567; Flu shots.
Anchorage	10/1/16, 8am - Noon	Health Fair at St. John’s United Methodist Church, 1801 O’Malley Rd, Anchorage, AK 99507; Flu shots.
Anchorage	10/8/16, 8am - Noon	Hispanic Health Fair - everyone’s welcome! Clark Middle School, 150 Bragaw St, Anchorage, AK 99508; Flu shots, family-oriented.
Girdwood	10/8/16, 9am - 1pm	Health Fair, Girdwood Community Center, 250 Egloff Dr, Girdwood, AK 99587; Flu shots, Mammogram Mobil.
Mat-Su Valley	10/12/16, 8:30am - 11:30am	Mat-Su Valley Health Fair, Palmer Senior Citizens Center, 1132 S Chugach St, Palmer, AK 99645; Flu shots.
Anchorage	10/15/16, 8am - Noon	Health Fair by Faith Lutheran Church, 5200 Lake Otis Pkwy, Anchorage, AK 99507. Family-oriented.
Anchorage	10/18/16, 7:30-10:30am	Health Fair at Credit Union 1, 1941 Abbot Road, Anchorage, AK 99507.
Kenai Peninsula	10/29/16, 8am - Noon	Kenai Peninsula Health Fair, Kenai Senior Center, 361 Senior Ct, Kenai, AK 99611.
Anchorage	11/12/16, 9am - 1pm	Health Fair, University Center, 3901 Old Seward Hwy Anchorage, AK 99503; Flu shots.
Fairbanks & Northern Regions		
Community	Date & Time	Event
Fairbanks	10/7/16, 8am - 11am	Health Fair, Fairbanks Senior Center, 1424 Moore St, Fairbanks, AK 99701; Flu shots.
North Pole	10/15/16, 8am - Noon	Health Fair at North Pole Plaza, 301 N Santa Claus Ln, North Pole, AK 99705; Flu shots.
Nome	10/21/16, 7am - Noon	Health Fair at Nome Recreation Center, 208 E 6th Ave, Nome, AK 99762; Flu shots.
Fairbanks	10/26/16, 7:30-10:30am	Health Fair by Credit Union 1, 453 University Ave.— S, Fairbanks, AK 99709; Flu shots.
Two Rivers	11/5/16, 8am - Noon	Health Fair at Pleasant Valley Community Center, 7234 Anders Ave., Two Rivers, AK 99716; Flu shots.

perts), Chakine explains that AHF is able to offer affordable in-depth training for staff and management on a variety of worksite wellness topics.

“Most employers that we work with elect to sponsor our comprehensive blood tests for their employees [especially the vitamin D test, which is usually not covered by health insurance]. Employers can also send their staff to our office in Anchorage for affordable blood tests. AHF health fairs are turn-key solutions,” he says.

Aside from nonprofit momentum, even state government gets involved in terms

of sponsorships, with the Alaska Department of Administration’s Division of Retirement and Benefits offering free blood tests to its AlaskaCare members at its November health fairs in Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, and Anchorage, some of which include flu shots and chemistry/hematology blood panel testing. Many unions in the state also offer periodic health fairs to members and their families, some at no cost, some at low cost.

### Not Just Urban

Health fairs and screenings aren’t just held



in larger Alaska cities and hospitals. South-East Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) serves eighteen communities in Southeast Alaska for primary care, behavioral health, dental, hospital, and health promotion services.

"Health Fairs are a great tool to reach out to the communities we serve and make it easier for community members to get vital information about individual health factors such as blood pressure or cholesterol," says Martha Pearson, SEARHC Health Promotion director. "Then, each person can make better decisions about their health. In addition, health fairs allow communities to host multiple service agencies that are available locally, such as SEARHC's outreach and enrollment program that helps connect folks to insurance coverage in the healthcare marketplace."

At a health fair, SEARHC typically offers expertise in injury prevention and car seat safety, women's health, tobacco prevention, traditional and local foods, diabetes prevention, behavioral health, and navigating the health insurance marketplace. Pearson says if it is not already provided, SEARHC staff also provides blood pressure and lipids testing.

This year, SEARHC actively participated in health fairs for Sitka, Juneau, Kake, Angoon, Tenakee Springs, Thorne Bay, Coffman Cove, Klawock, Haines, and Wrangell. Pearson says SEARHC will participate in other sites as the dates and scheduling occurs for them.

"SEARHC is able to provide 'boots on the ground' support in most of our communities as we have terrific staff who are passionate about health and always willing to promote it and help with events," Pearson says. "SEARHC serves the communities of Southeast with professional healthcare services, but we are also personally invested as friends, colleagues, and family members in the communities we serve. I believe this gives our patients the best of both worlds."

Pearson says providing a one-stop-shop increases access to services and gives people more choices in the directions they want for their health, and while SEARHC is typically not the lead organization for health fairs, it is much more efficient to partner with statewide efforts such as AHF and local tribal or school fairs. "By working collaboratively, SEARHC can increase our reach and provide information on our services alongside others available in the community," she says. ⚙

*Tom Anderson writes from across Alaska.*



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