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Seasonal Affective Disorder and Depression: Recognizing the Signs and Offering Support

By Senior Marketing Specialist Emma Irish



The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, 988, is available for anyone, including family members and caretakers of individuals who struggle with seasonal affective disorder, depression, or suicidal thoughts.

As the winter season brings shorter days and colder weather, it is common for some people to experience changes in mood. When these changes occur around the same time each year, it may be a condition called seasonal affective disorder. In winter, with the transition to less sunlight, SAD is more commonly seen as a form of depression that ranges from mild to severe — which may increase the risk for suicidal thoughts and behavior.

Here are some serious symptoms to watch out for:

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Lack of motivation for activities usually enjoyed
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Dramatic mood changes
- Feeling anxious, agitated, or angry
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing
- Changes in appetite, whether eating too much or too little
- Increase in unsafe coping behaviors, such as substance misuse
- Feeling hopeless, like no one cares about you, or that the world would be better off without you

Supporting loved ones through difficult times can have a profound impact on their well-being, but it is not always easy to know how to help. The following are some helpful ways to reach out to your loved ones who may be struggling with SAD or depression:

Stay Connected and Open

It is okay if you don't have all the answers. Even if you are unsure of what to say, your presence can help keep the conversation moving forward. Loop in a care provider or call 988 for support.

Expect and Respect Boundaries

It's not uncommon for someone to resist emotional conversations. Respect their boundaries, and if they are not ready to talk, express your willingness to support them whenever they are ready.

Know When to Speak Up

Sometimes, you may be asked to keep a loved one's concerns confidential. However, if what they share goes beyond your ability to help or suggests that they might be in danger, it's crucial to involve an expert.

Practice Self-Care

Self-care practices, such as maintaining a consistent routine of exercise and healthy eating, can also help manage symptoms of SAD. If going outside during the short winter days is not possible, consider using a SAD light to provide additional ultraviolet light, which may help alleviate symptoms. Consult with your provider to see if this might be beneficial.

If you or a loved one experiences four or more of these symptoms, or if any symptom is significantly affecting your life, it is important to reach out to a primary care provider. Integrated care teams can work with you to create a treatment plan tailored to your needs, including talking to a behavioral health consultant.

Remember, you are not alone in facing these challenges. Up to 10% of Alaskans experience SAD, according to a study by the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Whether you are dealing with SAD, supporting someone through a mental health crisis, or simply trying to stay connected during difficult times, Southcentral Foundation is here to support your wellness journey.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

For more information about behavioral health resources at Southcentral Foundation, visit <https://bit.ly/3SKTqyC> for suicide prevention resources, or check out <https://bit.ly/3t0w0rW> for more on their behavioral health services. You can also view the current learning circle calendar by visiting <https://bit.ly/3gEZzGX>.

FIND YOUR SUPPORT POD



Communities provide connections in life through our cultural traditions, family traditions, or new traditions we create ourselves. We gain hope through these supports.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call or text the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

988

SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

The Anchorage Native News is published by Southcentral Foundation Corporate Communications.

If you have questions, comments, wish to submit articles, or be added to our mailing list, please contact the Corporate Communications department.

SCF reserves the right to edit all submissions for clarity, length, and content.

Every article will be considered for publication depending on space available.

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Learn more about the Anchorage Native News at:

southcentralfoundation.com



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Breathe Easy: Steps to Protect and Prevent Respiratory Illness

By Southcentral Foundation Corporate Communications

Winter months offer many opportunities to celebrate together with tradition, recipes, and the warmth of family gatherings. However, sickness tends to spread more frequently in the winter months with increased time indoors. Don't spend these precious moments away from family due to illness. Prevent and protect against respiratory illness by following these essential steps:



Immunizations

COVID-19, RSV, and influenza are common respiratory infections that increase during winter months. This year, we are also seeing higher rates of pertussis. Immunizations have revolutionized preventative health care and play an important role in keeping you and those around you safe. They create antibodies for a virus or bacteria before you are exposed, giving you a

head start in fighting off illness. While most seasonal immunizations are recommended in late fall, some people may benefit from receiving an immunization in later months. Your primary care team is happy to answer any questions you have about immunizations and help ensure your immunizations are up to date. You can also download the Docket app to access your immunization records.



Handwashing

Washing your hands for at least 20 seconds in warm water with antibacterial soap is one of the best ways to prevent illness. Ensuring your hands are rinsed of all soap and completely dry prevents bacteria from sticking or being transferred. Hand sanitizer is a good option when handwashing is not available.

“Common times to wash your hands include after using the bathroom, after sneezing or coughing, before and after preparing food, and after or during public events where you are touching

objects or shaking hands,” Southcentral Foundation Senior Medical Director Dr. Donna Galbreath shared.



Rest

Upper respiratory infections may persist for up to 10-14 days. Allowing yourself space and time to heal will ensure you do not spread illness to others and help you feel better faster.

“When you are ill, getting enough rest and sleep helps your body recover from an illness and can speed up your recovery,” Galbreath said. “Staying home when you are sick is not just a suggestion, it's a way to expedite your recovery.”



Connect with your primary care team

Some medical conditions resolve on their own with over-the-counter medication, time, rest, and fluids. When symptoms such as difficulty breathing, chest pain, dehydration, or high fever not controlled by medication occur, you should contact your primary care team or seek medical attention. Other concerning symptoms include confusion, extreme fatigue, severe coughing that leads to vomiting, or irregular heartbeat.

By following these steps, you can reduce your risk of getting sick and expedite healing if you do get sick. Connect with your primary care team throughout the year to discuss the best ways to keep you and your family healthy.

For more information, connect with your primary care team or visit southcentralfoundation.com.

Vaccines Are Safe and Effective

Vaccines protect yourself and others, prevent illness and disease, and are safe and effective.

Connect with your primary care team to learn more about:

- Suggested immunization schedules
- Seasonal flu vaccines
- The HPV vaccine for cancer prevention
- Available COVID-19 vaccines and boosters

Russian Christmas Celebration

Join Southcentral Foundation as we celebrate Russian Christmas.

Tuesday, Jan. 7
2-4 p.m.
Anchorage Native Primary Care Center Lobby



UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES

Many Southcentral Foundation programs will be closed.

TUESDAY, DEC. 24 AND WEDNESDAY, DEC. 25

in observance of the Christmas holiday.
Services will resume Thursday, Dec. 26.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 1

in observance of New Year's Day.
Services will resume Thursday, Jan. 2.

MONDAY, JAN. 20

in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.
Services will resume Tuesday, Jan. 21.

Wishing you and yours

a happy and safe holiday season!

IF YOU NEED IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION, PLEASE CALL 911.

Year in Review

Southcentral Foundation celebrates a successful year of working together with the Alaska Native Community to achieve wellness through health and related services.



Russian Christmas celebrations were hosted on the Alaska Native Health Campus in January. Clergy and parishioners led attendees through the observances with songs and the starring.



Southcentral Foundation, along with community partners, broke ground on the behavioral health expansion project at Tudor Road and Elmore Road in May. The expanded facility will allow SCF to provide 23-hour crisis stabilization, crisis residential, expanded withdrawal management, and outpatient behavioral services.

The annual Fun Run in support of diabetes prevention and awareness kicked off the spring season. Participants chose between a 1-mile and 5k course in this community event.



In May, Southcentral Foundation successfully coordinated providing nurses and behavioral health consultant support to schools in McGrath, Nikolai, and Takotna. Behavioral health services are offered via telehealth with in-person visits available at each school to fill a gap in student support.



Indian Health Service Director Roselyn Tso visited Southcentral Foundation clinics in May and August to understand the unique challenges to providing health care in rural Alaska. Tso toured Anchorage Native Primary Care Center, *Benteh Nuutah* Valley Native Primary Care Center, *C'eyiits' Hwnax* Life House Community Health Center, Nilavena Regional Health Center, Pedro Bay Community Health Clinic, and Eklutna Community Clinic.

Indian Creek Health Clinic celebrated 10 years of providing health care in partnership with the Native Village of Tyonek and Indian Creek Health Department.



Nutaqsiivik Tribal Home Visiting Program celebrated 30 years of providing families, mothers, and infants with support in raising healthy future generations.

Nutaqsiivik Celebrating 30 Years



In July, Southcentral Foundation hosted examiners for the Baldrige Foundation to demonstrate SCF's organizational resilience, performance excellence, and long-term success. This year, SCF received Baldrige Best Practice Spotlight recognition in three categories: integrated health care system, workforce development, and data and information management approaches.



Pharmacy lockers were added at the south entrance of the Anchorage Native Primary Care Center. The lockers provide customer-owners the option of picking up prescription refills. Mail delivery is also available through the My MobileRx app, and customer-owners are always welcome to visit ANPCC Pharmacy.



Southcentral Foundation hosted quarterly *Łuq'u ts'it nihdanlggash*—Everyone Coming Together events at the Anchorage Native Primary Care Center. Customer-owners and employees participated in cultural activities, accessed community and health resources, enjoyed traditional foods, and shopped with Alaska Native vendors.



Child and Family Outpatient Services launched Intensive Home-Based Treatment in June. The program partners customer-owners and families with community case managers and a dedicated clinical support team to provide youth behavioral health support at home as an alternative to residential treatment options or transitioning on return from those programs.



Southcentral Foundation presented Healthy Futures Day at the Alaska State Fair. Employees braved a wet and windy day to meet customers and community members, sharing about programs and services available at SCF.



Southcentral Foundation hosted the Elder Fall Harvest Potluck at the Nuka Learning and Wellness Center. Nearly 300 Elder customer-owners and their families enjoyed healthy meals, dancing, and door prizes with the support of dozens of SCF employees and partners.



Southcentral Foundation's Family Wellness Warriors hosted observances and awareness walks in April and October in recognition of Child Abuse and Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Domestic Violence Awareness and Action Month. FWW spotlighted community partners and the connection of building generational healing.

Southcentral Foundation continued its Boo to the Flu campaign to increase awareness of receiving the influenza vaccine, supported by Saturday flu clinics at the Anchorage Native Primary Care Center in October.



At the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention Oct. 17-19 in Anchorage, Southcentral Foundation provided attendees information about SCF programs and services as well as opportunities for health incentives.



Southcentral Foundation held a Careers and Coffee job fair in January and November. Representatives from various SCF departments and programs were available to answer questions and provide information on current job openings.



The Development Center hosted a family barbecue night in July for current participants in the Clinical Initiatives Scholarship Program, which aims to rapidly increase the number of Alaska Native and American Indian people in clinical positions at SCF by providing scholarships and mentorship.

Southcentral Foundation Expands Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes Services for Statewide Access

By Marketing Specialist Stephanie Smith

Earlier this fall, Southcentral Foundation launched an expansion of pediatric endocrinology and diabetes services, now available to children from birth to age 18 across Alaska. Designed to support families statewide with hormone-related health needs, the expansion means more access to early diagnosis, specialized treatments, and ongoing management of complex endocrine conditions.

With the addition of two pediatric endocrinologists, two nurses, and a second pediatric diabetes educator, SCF has increased access to quality care and personalized support. Virtual appointments make it easier for families, even in remote areas, to connect with experts without the need to travel.

"We hope that this expansion will improve access to pediatric endocrinology care across the state and set the foundation for a sustainable, long-term solution to meeting the needs of our community," SCF Pediatric Endocrinologist Dr. Rachel Kerford Lescher said.

SCF's Alaska Subspecialty Pediatric Network aims to meet the growing needs of families, offering improved access to specialists equipped to manage a range of pediatric endocrine conditions. Pediatric endocrinologists have specialized training in how glands and hormones affect infants, children, and adolescents.

"The endocrine system is a connection of glands that are sending messages, which are hormones, throughout the blood stream to tell the



Southcentral Foundation's expansion through the Alaska Subspecialty Pediatric Network aims to enhance specialized pediatric care statewide.

rest of the body what to do," Lescher said, explaining the crucial role hormones play in guiding growth, development, and overall health.

Hormonal issues, often lifelong and sometimes present at birth, can impact various aspects of a child's health, including growth and pubertal development. If a child is not growing as expected or shows signs of an endocrine disorder, a visit to a pediatric endocrinologist may be necessary.

"We want to assure you that your child's health needs come first and the whole team is working hard to meet those needs as our state grows," Lescher said.

A key priority of the expansion was maintaining continuity of care, ensuring children experience smooth transitions

and uninterrupted care, even with changes in their care team. This approach has supported families in receiving consistent guidance through every step of their child's journey.

For more information or questions about pediatric endocrinology and diabetes services, families are encouraged to contact their primary care team or visit southcentralfoundation.com. Interested in meeting the Alaska Subspecialty Pediatric Network team? Scan the QR code.



Tribal Doctor Receives Prestigious AFN Award

By Southcentral Foundation Corporate Communications



Tribal Doctor Colleen Anagick.

Colleen Anagick received the Alaska Federation of Natives 2024 President's Award for Health at the AFN Convention Oct. 18.

Of Inupiaq, Yupik, and Irish heritage, Anagick has improved community wellness through her 27 years of commitment to Alaska Native-led health care, first as a behavioral health clinician and more recently as a Tribal doctor.

Anagick began her work at Alaska Native Medical Center the year the new building opened as the largest Indian Health Service facility in the country. It was the year Alaska Native people made plans for completing customer-ownership of the entire Anchorage-based Tribal health care system.

"Generations of customer-owners have benefited from Colleen's work here at Southcentral Foundation," SCF President and CEO April Kyle said. "She has many strengths as a provider, including keeping traditional values at the core of the customer-owner experience."

Over the years she worked as a crisis clinician on the Behavioral Urgent Response Team, her strong Indigenous identity helped her meet the whole-person needs of those experiencing behavioral health challenges. In her current role as a Tribal doctor in the Traditional Healing Clinic, Anagick provides traditional counseling and healing touch and facilitates the Women's Talking Circle. Her respect for culture and her ability to connect with others as they share their stories have made it possible for her to provide effective, comprehensive supports.

Southcentral Foundation congratulates Anagick for earning this AFN recognition and appreciates her decades of wellness work in support of the SCF Mission.

SCF Physician Named Woman of Achievement

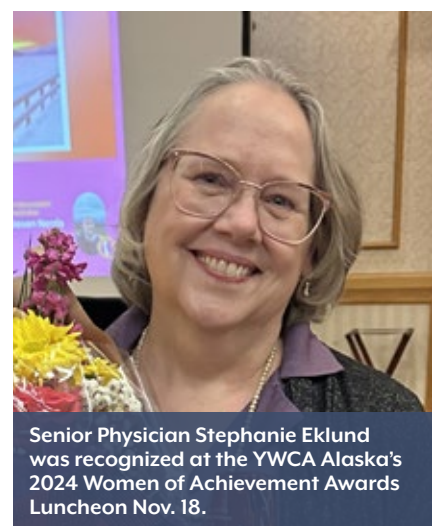
By Southcentral Foundation Corporate Communications

Alaskans celebrated Southcentral Foundation Senior Physician Stephanie Eklund's leadership and positive impact at YWCA Alaska's 2024 Women of Achievement Awards Luncheon Nov. 18.

Each year, 10 women are honored for their exemplary service to their communities and alignment with the mission of YWCA Alaska to "empower women, eliminate racism, and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all."

Eklund has provided more than three decades of personalized care to Alaskans. She has been a strong advocate for wellness across the lifespan, focusing on labor and delivery, surgeries, prevention, and health education in the OB-GYN clinic. Moreover, she has led the medical forensic examination services for women experiencing sexual and physical violence in the Anchorage region for 20 years. As the medical director for the Forensic Nursing Services at Providence – part of the renowned Anchorage-based Sexual Assault Response Team – Eklund has spent years breaking down barriers to provide exceptional health care to women in their time of greatest need. She has overseen medical treatment, the collection of forensic evidence, and the ongoing care and emotional support provided to adult and adolescent survivors and their families in the aftermath of sexual and/or physical assault. This has not been merely a job for Eklund, but rather, a calling.

YWCA Alaska's annual recognition of "Women of Achievement" encourages and inspires women of all ages to strive for success and create positive impact in their communities.



Senior Physician Stephanie Eklund was recognized at the YWCA Alaska's 2024 Women of Achievement Awards Luncheon Nov. 18.

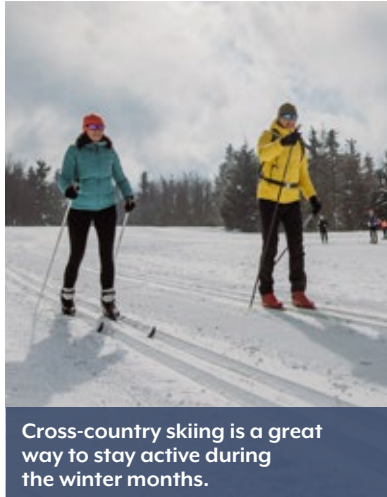
Benefits of Keeping Active During the Winter

By Marketing Specialist Shamika Andrew

The winter season can be a challenging time to stay active, with colder temperatures and fewer daylight hours. Staying physically active is one of the best ways to improve your mental and physical health during these cold months. Getting enough physical activity can immediately reduce feelings of anxiety and help you sleep better. Over the long-term, it can reduce the risk of depression.

Regular physical activity also supports:

- Improving balance
- Lowering the risk of Type 2 diabetes
- Strengthening bones and muscles
- Lowering blood pressure
- Maintaining or losing weight



Cross-country skiing is a great way to stay active during the winter months.

Before heading out to enjoy outdoor activities, take safety steps to prepare yourself. Check the weather and temperature and dress accordingly for rain, snow, and cold temperatures. Ensure you are visible during darker hours by using reflective tape or safety lights. Let someone know where you are going when recreating outdoors. Keep a charged cell phone with you in case of an emergency. Be aware of your surroundings when out in the wilderness. If venturing onto frozen lakes or rivers, check to make sure the ice is safe to walk on. Set reasonable limits on the amount of time spent outside for young children to prevent hypothermia and frostbite.

Visit southcentralfoundation.com to learn more about resources that support physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness.

Here are some outdoor activities you can do to keep your body moving:

Ice skating

Lace up your ice skates and go skating with family and friends.

Snowshoeing

Take a winter stroll in your neighborhood or on a snowy trail.

Sledding

Grab your sleds and see which family member can sled down the hill fastest.

Skiing or snowboarding

Gear up and hit the slopes of Hilltop Ski Area in Anchorage, Alyeska Ski Resort in Girdwood, or Skeetawk in Palmer.

Ice fishing

Catch your dinner at one of the many stocked lakes in Anchorage or the Matanuska-Susitna Borough including DeLong Lake, Mirror Lake, Sand Lake, Jewel Lake, Big Lake, or Finger Lake. Enjoy catching arctic char, grayling, pike, and even landlocked salmon.

Snow tubing

Enjoy some tubing at your favorite sledding hill or visit the Arctic Valley Tube Park for a thrilling ride.

Cross-country skiing

Cross-country skiing is a great option for staying active and energized during the winter. Southcentral Foundation Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Exercise host cross-country skiing classes. Come equipped with your own skis and sign-in at the reception desk. All abilities welcome. No pre-registration required. For more information, contact Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Exercise at 907-729-6683.

Walking

Regular walking can improve your mood, and participating in walking in groups allows you to remain socially connected to neighbors and friends.

Thank You

TO OUR FUNDERS!

- | | |
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| Administration for Children and Families | Kaiser Foundation Hospitals |
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| | University of New Mexico |
| | Winifred L. Stevens Foundation |

Qagaasakung Quyanaq 'Awa'ahdah Mahsi'
 Igamsiqanaghalek Háw'aa Quyana
 T'oyaxsm Chin'an Tsin'aen Gunalchéesh
 Quyanaa Thank You

Connecting Kids to Coverage

Medicaid and Denali KidCare health insurance programs can cover the cost of the care needed to keep your kids healthy.

For more information contact Southcentral Foundation Family Health Resources at 907-729-4470.

Southcentral Foundation's

Virtual Nuka Conference

Feb. 10-14

For more information contact Learning Institute at SCFNukaEvent@scf.cc | SCFNuka.com | 907-729-6852

Aging Well: Fall Prevention

By Southcentral Foundation Corporate Communications

Nelson enjoys living on his own and being active. However, he has been feeling dizzy lately and had a fall. Nelson shares this information with his primary care provider, and they discuss how the dizziness may be caused by his blood pressure medication. They work together with his integrated care team's pharmacist to make changes.

Have you had a fall like Nelson? This scenario is fictitious but demonstrates how falls are common enough that it is likely you or a friend or family member have experienced one. However, most falls are preventable. They are not inevitable as we age.

"Yes, the risks increase for falls as we get older, but there are resources and supports available to help you live a life free from falls, and free from the fear of falling," Anchorage Native Primary Care Center Medical Director Dr. Allison Critchlow said.

Nelson, for example, collaborated with his primary care provider and pharmacist to change his blood pressure medication. He also started seeing a physical therapist who helps increase his strength and balance through exercise. Nelson no longer gets dizzy when he stands up. Now that he is stronger and knows his options, he feels at ease and can continue enjoying his daily activities.

By sharing any concerns with your health care team, you can also find ways to stay strong, improve balance, and support your independence.

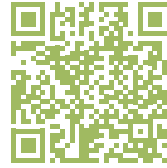
Four steps to prevent falls:

Be physically active. Tai Chi? Walking? Gym exercises? Meet with an exercise physiologist (by referral from your provider) and find a favorite way to maintain or increase your strength and balance. Drink water before and after activities to feel less dizzy and less tired.

Care for your eyes and ears. Make it a point, every year, to visit Optometry, for a vision test and Audiology for a hearing test. They can make recommendations, such as new prescription glasses, to reduce your risk of falling.

Make your home safer. Remove hazards, improve lighting, and install non-slip rugs, grab bars, and handrails. Need guidance? Request a referral to Occupational Therapy and they will not only suggest options for a safer living space, but also provide activities to help you stay independent.

Talk with your care team. Your provider can offer personalized steps to reduce your risks, including reviewing your medicines and/or supplements for interactions or side effects.



For more information, visit:
southcentralfoundation.com/aging-well
 or scan the QR code.



Ways to prevent slips and falls

- Wear studded cleats to help with traction.
- Scan ahead for black ice or ice patches.
- Walk slow and take small steps.
- Get enough calcium and vitamin D in your diet for bone health.
- Put down sand or gravel over common traveling areas.
- When going inside be sure to wipe your shoes.
- Have a means of communication in case of an accident.
- Ask a primary care provider about risk of falls.

To schedule an appointment, please visit MyHealth or contact your primary care team.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p>Behavioral Health Consultant 10 a.m.-noon</p> <p>Traditional Healing Drum Group with Gilbert "Buz" Daney 10:30-11:30 a.m.</p> <p>Shopping * 12:30-2 p.m.</p> <p><small>*Please call the Elder Program at 907-729-6500 for transportation. Space is limited.</small></p>	<p>Culture and Traditions 10 a.m.-2 p.m.</p> 	<p>Family Health Resources 10 a.m.-noon</p> <p>Behavioral Health Consultant 10 a.m.-noon</p> <p>Bingo Noon-2 p.m.</p> 	<p>Health Education and Exercise** Noon-2 p.m.</p> <p><small>**Please call SCF Health Education at 907-729-2689 for more information.</small></p> 	<p>Nurse Practitioner Services 10 a.m.-2 p.m.</p> <p>Elder Jam Noon-2 p.m.</p>
SCF Elder Program 6901 East Tudor Road, Suite 8, Anchorage, AK 99507 907-729-6500				

Important Phone Numbers	
Alaska Native Medical Center	907-563-2662
AARP	907-762-3388
Anchorage Police Department (non-emergency).....	907-786-8500
Anchor Rides.....	907-343-6543
Cook Inlet Housing Authority.....	907-793-3000
Division of Public Assistance	800-478-7778
Division of Senior and Disabilities Services.....	800-478-9996
Food Bank of Alaska	907-272-3663
People Mover	907-343-4536
Salvation Army Meals on Wheels	907-349-0613
Southcentral Foundation	907-729-4955
SCF Elder Program Event Hotline.....	907-729-6588