

Executive Summary –
Arctic Community Health and Wellbeing

Purpose: To understand existing and emerging health disparities and challenges, while considering the role innovative solutions have to delivery systems, and for preventive efforts, in supporting Arctic Community wellbeing.

Perception: Community health and wellbeing is a critical issue for all of Alaska and that, as a state-wide issue, there are very limited impacts specific to Alaska's Arctic.

Promise: While many health disparities have proven refractory a combination of social-ecological factors, preventive measures and clinical treatment, have the potential to significantly impact and improve Alaskan community wellbeing.

Challenges: Capability and capacity over a vast and isolated landscape have been existing challenges to providing adequate health care, medical emergency response, and preventive services. A rapidly changing environment, evolving social and governance systems and increasing human activity in Alaska's Arctic, exacerbated these challenges.

Current Activity: The State of Alaska is working on public health issues at the community level. The Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group addresses circumpolar health issues; Canada has placed emphasis on mental health during its chairmanship. Federal agencies, e.g. USARC, continue to work on water and sanitation issues, and current efforts are supporting translational research that useful for practical applications of decentralized water/sewer systems.

Key Takeaways:

- Alaska faces some challenges related to the capacity of local governments to provide health care services; main differences are seen in Boroughs vs unorganized regions.
- Alaska Native health care organizations are filling some major gaps but we still don't have a clear picture of what their role is and how, or if, it can be expanded.
- State of Alaska struggles with providing public health services to many villages outside of their 23 hub locations. State has partnered with Native organizations on media campaigns related to public health.
- In many cases a high percentage of resources are allocated to reactionary clinical treatments that do not have high impact, nor do they influence preventive efforts.
- Socio-ecological factors that lead to healthy communities can have a huge impact mitigating adverse health impacts that may emerge in the future. These are things such as changing behaviors related to water and sewer sanitation, encouraging high level activities, supporting traditional diets (low carbohydrate foods) and subsistence activities in culturally relevant ways.

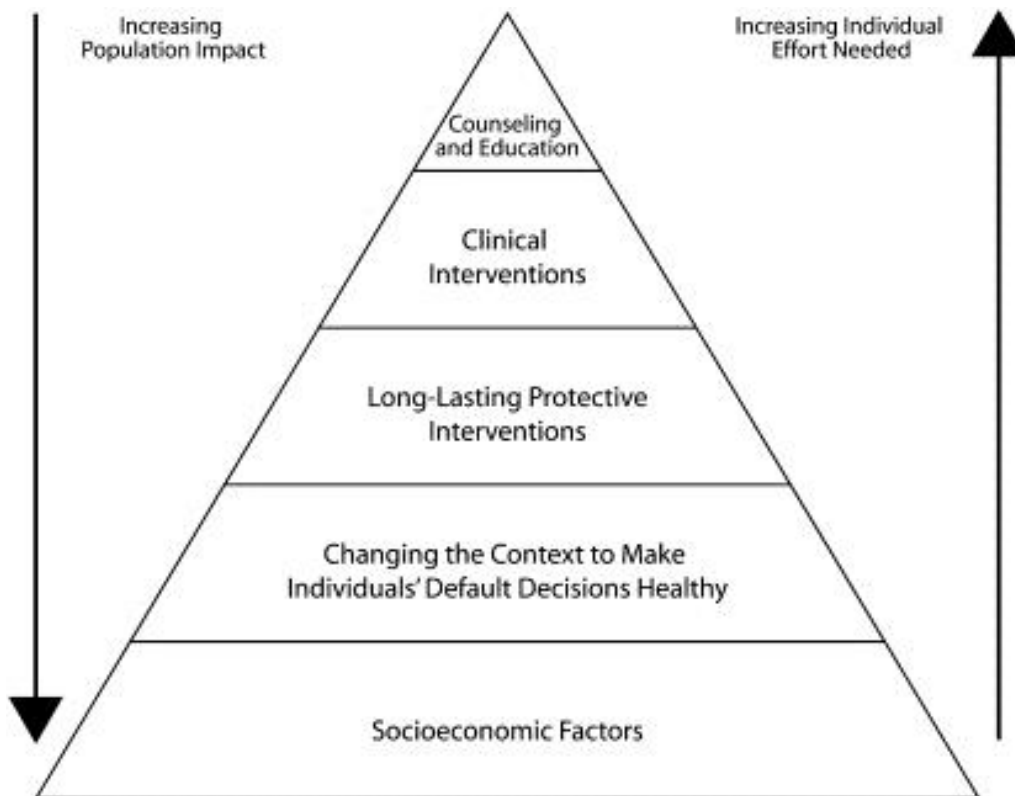
Recommendations for Consideration:

1. Promote reducing the cost of living in Rural Alaska by promoting LNG and alternative energy sources, and possibly developing demonstration projects in various communities.
2. Increase management capacity in rural communities, e.g. see the DCRA model for local government specialist program.
3. Increased funding for the Public Health Nurse program, school nurse positions, and greater dissemination of public health information (Dept of Edu).
4. The State of Alaska and Federal Government should work together regarding water and sewer and landfill innovations for the villages that reduce the costs of living with a focus on keeping things simple. The State should assess the impacts of Agency regulations regarding water sanitation and work with communities in finding a way to comply with existing regulations.

5. Promote development of culturally sensitive, treatment facilities in rural settings.
6. Encourage mitigating adverse health impacts through support of socio-ecological factors that lead to healthy communities, e.g. programs that change behaviors related to water and sewer sanitation, encourage high activity levels, support traditional diets (low carbohydrate foods) and subsistence activities in culturally relevant ways.
7. Continue to fund science and research studies on contaminants in subsistence foods and food security, and introduce further requirements for researchers to share with communities the major challenges, emerging issues, findings, and potential solutions.
8. Continue research regarding suicide/addiction/depression etc. in rural villages, with an emphasis on community-supported participatory research and culturally relevant treatment solutions.

Next steps: The conversation on Arctic Community health needs to continue so that we can better understand the local capacity and management systems that would support community wellbeing. In particular, there is a need to understand the role and responsibilities of the Native health corporations/organizations. What would the health impact pyramid (see Figure 1) look like from the lens of those in Alaska's Arctic.

Figure 1. The health impact pyramid.



Citation: Frieden, T.R. A Framework for Public Health Action: The Health Impact Pyramid, [Am J Public Health. 2010 April; 100\(4\): 590–595.](#)