



Department of Public Safety

COUNCIL ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE &
SEXUAL ASSAULT
Executive Director, Lauree Morton

450 Whittier Street
PO Box 111200
Juneau, Alaska 99811-1200
Main: 907.465.4356
Fax: 907.465.3627

My Turn: Healthcare, Medicaid Expansion and Domestic Violence

By Lauree Morton, Executive Director, Council on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

"The doctor's office is a good place to go because it's neutral. It's not like telling your husband you're going to the police department." -A survivor of domestic violence

Medicaid expansion allows previously uninsured women to receive life-saving medical care. Physical injuries are the most recognized health impacts of domestic violence. Frequently unrecognized, however, are a victim's ongoing health impacts from the violence. National research has found that domestic violence contributes to many ongoing health problems, including traumatic brain injury, migraines and headaches, chronic pain syndromes, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and pregnancy difficulties including low birth weight and perinatal deaths.

The Alaska Victimization Survey is a cross-sectional survey providing baseline estimates of intimate partner and sexual violence for Alaskan women. A recent study of the survey data found that victimization increased the odds of health problems for all women, but significantly more so for minority women (*Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice, Volume 7, Special Issue 2*). The study suggested the need for early intervention through screening and counseling by healthcare providers to help prevent further abuse, lessen disability, and lead to improved health status.

-More-

Trusted resources in their communities, health care providers are in a unique position to connect women who experience domestic violence with support. Under Medicaid expansion eight preventive medical services are available to all women, two of which-domestic violence screening and counseling and HIV screening and counseling- are vital resources for women suffering domestic violence or at risk for domestic violence.

Screening increases opportunities for identification and intervention with women whose symptoms are not generally associated with domestic violence. When victims of domestic violence or those at risk for domestic violence are identified early, providers are able to intervene to help them understand their options, live more safely within the relationship or safely leave the relationship.

Medicaid expansion also provides screening and counseling for HIV to women. Perpetrators of domestic violence use sexual violence to control their intimate partners, increasing the risk of contracting HIV. Being HIV positive is also a significant risk factor for increased violence and control by an abusive partner. Through early intervention and counseling women can better understand these risks and how to protect themselves.

Access to healthcare is integral to stopping domestic violence. Medicaid expansion provides important steps in helping under-served Alaskan victims of violence receive the help and services they need to heal physically, mentally and emotionally from the effects of domestic violence and sexual assault.

-End-