



# Senior BENEFITS PROGRAM

Information & Fact Sheet  
Updated January 2018

## Overview

The Alaska Senior Benefits Payment Program pays monthly cash benefits to Alaskans who are age 65 or older and have low to moderate income. Payment levels depend on available state funding and how many people apply and qualify for the program. If the state budget cannot support the original amounts of \$125, \$175 and \$250, regulations allow for changes to be made for all eligible program participants. Cuts come from the highest income tier first, then the second, then the third.

The monthly payment for the highest income level was reduced to \$47 from \$125 on March 1, 2016 due to the state's limited budget for state fiscal year 2016.\* The budget for state fiscal year 2017 (July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017) allowed full monthly payments of \$175 and \$250 to recipients with the lowest income. Those income payment levels continued through the end of that fiscal year. Funding reductions in this program must be applied to individuals in the highest income bracket. They received \$47 for July because the budget was not finalized in time to make changes for July benefits. Beginning August 1, 2016, individuals in that highest income bracket received \$76 per month based on available funding at that income bracket. These income payment levels continued for state fiscal year 2018 (July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018).

\* Due to a technical difficulty changing the benefit amount for the highest income tier, some seniors who were due to receive \$47 per month in April received \$125. To compensate, those that received the incorrect amount received \$8 per month in May and June.

## Eligibility and Payment

- Eligibility and payment amount is based on gross annual income (before any deductions are taken for taxes, Medicare premiums, etc.)
- Assets, such as savings, are not counted
- Income limits may change yearly along with Alaska's federal poverty level. The \$250, \$175, and \$76 monthly payments correspond to 75 percent, 100 percent, and 175 percent of the federal poverty level for Alaska, respectively
- Payments are not available to seniors living in the following institutions:
  - ✓ Prison or jail
  - ✓ A nursing home
  - ✓ Alaska Pioneers' Home or Alaska Veterans' Home
  - ✓ Public or private institution for mental disease

| Senior Household Size | Senior Benefits Program Gross Annual Income Limit<br>Effective 4/1/2017             |                                 |                                 |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                       | The income limit changed April 1, 2017 due to a change in the Federal Poverty Limit |                                 |                                 |
|                       | \$250 monthly payment   | \$175 monthly payment           | \$76 monthly payment            |
| Individual            | \$11,295<br>(\$942 per month)   | \$15,060<br>(\$1,255 per month) | \$26,355<br>(\$2,197 per month) |
| Married Couple        | \$15,218<br>(\$1,269 per month)   | \$20,290<br>(\$1,691 per month) | \$35,508<br>(\$2,959 per month) |

| Senior Household Size | Senior Benefits Program Gross Annual Income Limit<br>Effective 8/1/2016<br>*Benefit change effective August 1, 2016 due to final state budget |                                 |                                 |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                       | \$250 monthly payment   | \$175 monthly payment           | *\$76 monthly payment           |
| Individual            | \$11,130<br>(\$928 per month)   | \$14,840<br>(\$1,237 per month) | \$25,970<br>(\$2,165 per month) |
| Married Couple        | \$15,015<br>(\$1,252 per month)   | \$20,020<br>(\$1,669 per month) | \$35,035<br>(\$2,920 per month) |

| Senior Household Size | Senior Benefits Program Gross Annual Income Limit<br>Effective 4/1/2016<br>The income limit changed April 1, 2016 due to a change in the Federal Poverty Limit |                                 |                                 |
|-----------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                       | \$250 monthly payment  | \$175 monthly payment           | \$47 monthly payment            |
| Individual            | \$11,130<br>(\$928 per month)  | \$14,840<br>(\$1,237 per month) | \$25,970<br>(\$2,165 per month) |
| Married Couple        | \$15,015<br>(\$1,252 per month)  | \$20,020<br>(\$1,669 per month) | \$35,035<br>(\$2,920 per month) |

| Senior Household Size | Senior Benefits Program Gross Annual Income Limit<br>Effective 3/1/2016<br>*Benefit change effective March 1, 2016 due to budget shortfall, caseload increase |                                 |                                 |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                       | \$250 monthly payment   | \$175 monthly payment           | *\$47 monthly payment           |
| Individual            | \$11,040<br>(\$920 per month)   | \$14,720<br>(\$1,227 per month) | \$25,760<br>(\$2,146 per month) |
| Married Couple        | \$14,940<br>(\$1,245 per month)   | \$19,920<br>(\$1,660 per month) | \$34,860<br>(\$2,905 per month) |

### Senior Benefits recipients as of December 2017

- 11,322 recipients. Number and percent of seniors at each payment level:
  - ✓ \$250 – 1,742 (15.4%)
  - ✓ \$175 – 5,082 (44.9%)
  - ✓ \$76 – 4,496 (39.7%)
- As of December 2017, the average age of recipients is 75 and the maximum age is 104
- The number of Senior Benefits cases have been increasing each year until 2016. All figures are for December:
  - ✓ 2017 – 11,322
  - ✓ 2016 – 11,632
  - ✓ 2015 – 11,746
  - ✓ 2014 – 11,222
  - ✓ 2013 – 10,954
  - ✓ 2012 – 10,789

**Recipients statewide as of December 2017:**

| <b>Census Area</b> | <b>Number of Recipients</b> | <b>Census Area</b> | <b>Number of Recipients</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Aleutians East     | 22                          | Lake and Peninsula | 38                          |
| Aleutians West     | 25                          | Mat-Su             | 1,582                       |
| Anchorage          | 4,253                       | Nome               | 231                         |
| Bethel             | 519                         | North Slope        | 33                          |
| Bristol Bay        | 8                           | NW Arctic          | 156                         |
| Denali             | 15                          | Petersburg         | 86                          |
| Dillingham         | 115                         | Prince of Wales    | 192                         |
| Fairbanks N Star   | 857                         | SE Fairbanks       | 197                         |
| Haines             | 87                          | Sitka              | 99                          |
| Hoonah-Angoon      | 76                          | Skagway            | 8                           |
| Juneau             | 353                         | Valdez / Cordova   | 162                         |
| Kenai              | 1,171                       | Wrangell           | 83                          |
| Ketchikan Gateway  | 275                         | Yakutat            | 12                          |
| Kodiak             | 209                         | Yukon / Koyukuk    | 251                         |
| Kusilvak           | 207                         | GRAND TOTAL        | 11,322                      |

| <b>History of the Senior Benefits Program</b> |  |
|---|--|
| 1972 - 2003                                   | <b>Alaska Longevity Bonus Program.</b> Established in 1972. Alaska residents became eligible at age 65. \$250/month was issued to seniors who applied before 1994, \$200 to those applying in 1994, \$150 to those applying in 1995, and \$100 to those applying in 1996. Payments were not available to seniors who applied after 1996. The program was subsequently defunded in 2003, and final benefits were issued for the month of August 2003.   |
| 2003 - 2004                                   | <b>Senior Assistance Program.</b> Beginning September 2003, the Governor's office used its executive authority to establish the needs-based Senior Assistance program in response to the needs of low-income Alaskans aged 65 and older who were financially impacted by the elimination of the Alaska Longevity Bonus. Payments were limited to \$120/month. The program ended March 2004.  |
| 2004 - 2007                                   | <b>SeniorCare Program.</b> Beginning April 2004, the SeniorCare Program was established to replace the former Senior Assistance Program. The new program was expanded to include a prescription drug benefit. Low-income seniors that passed the program's income and resource limits could choose to receive either a \$120/month payment or a prescription drug benefit. The program ended July 2007.  |
| 2007 - Present                                | <b>Senior Benefits Program.</b> Established to replace the SeniorCare Program. Began August 2007; up for reauthorization in June 2018. Provides three payment levels based on the senior's gross annual income. Income limits are tied to the Federal Poverty Guidelines for Alaska and change each year as the poverty level changes. There is no asset test.<br><br>Regulation change finalized January 2016 described how benefits would be reduced by appropriation shortfall. Due to caseload increase, the highest income level that normally receives a \$125 benefit had the benefit reduced to \$47 effective March 1, 2016.<br><br>The budgets for state fiscal years 2017 and 2018 allowed for a monthly payment of \$76 to recipients in the highest income level. |