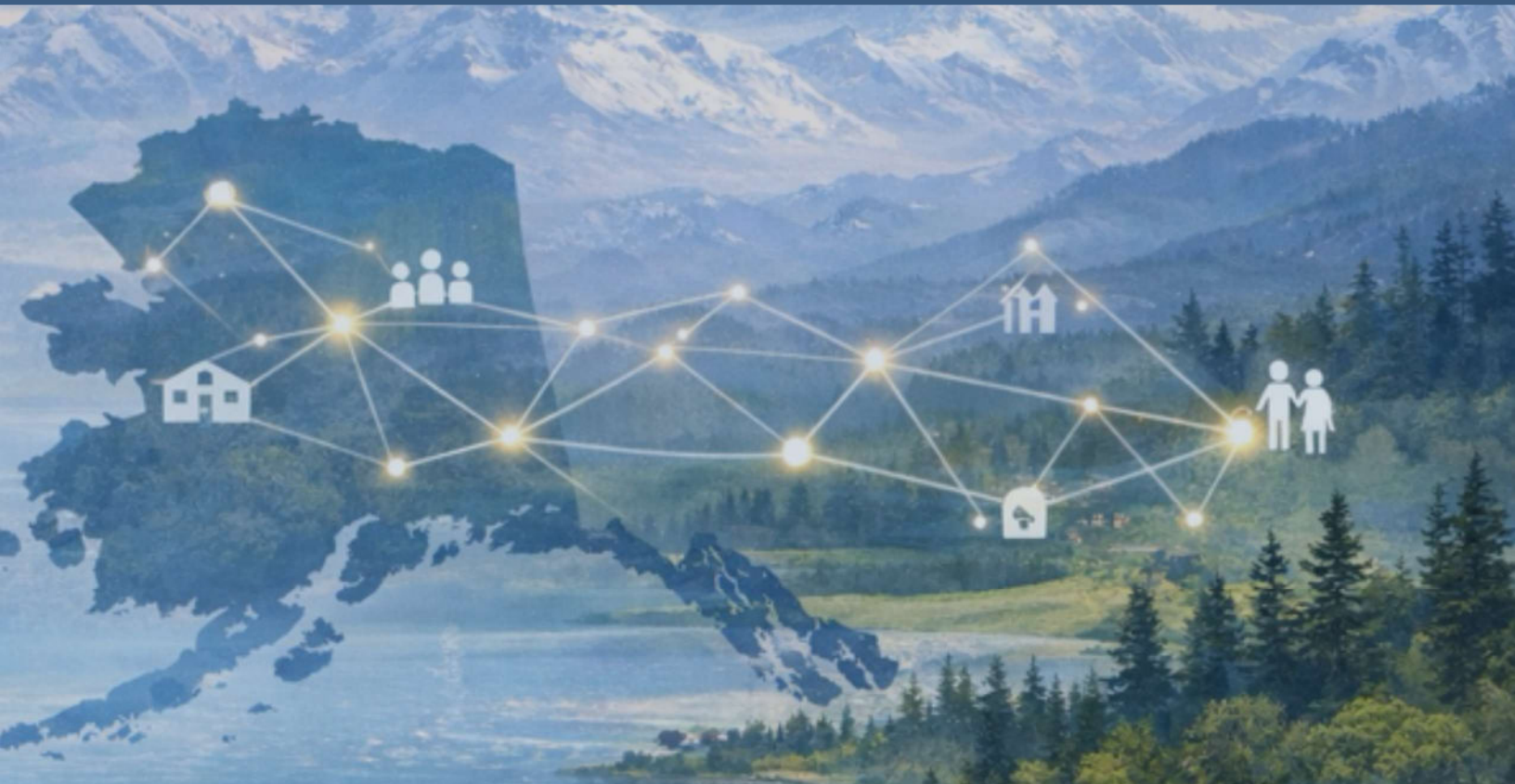


Independent Living Center Community Forum Self-Directed Medicaid Waiver



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Trust

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Voices from the Forums

The statewide community forums brought together people who receive services, family members, providers, advocates, Tribal partners, care coordinators, and state staff to talk about the future of self-directed Medicaid services in Alaska.

Participants came from different communities and brought different experiences. Some had used self-direction before, while others were learning about it for the first time. Although opinions varied on specific program details, several ideas were heard throughout the state.

These statements reflect the values that guided the conversations and the vision participants shared for Alaska's future.

+ "The best system is one that provides people options."

Participants agreed that self-direction should expand choices, not replace traditional provider services. People should be able to choose the service model that best meets their needs and change options as their lives and circumstances change.

+ "Nothing about me without me."

Participants emphasized that people who receive services should have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their lives. They want a person-centered system where individuals help shape their own goals, services, and supports.

+ "People have a right to risk. There is dignity in risk."

Participants spoke about the importance of balancing personal choice with health and safety. They recognized that everyone should have the opportunity to make informed decisions about their own lives. Safeguards are important, but they should support people rather than unnecessarily limit independence or self-determination.

+ "Alaska has to build an Alaska program."

Participants encouraged Alaska to learn from other states while creating a program that reflects Alaska's unique geography, cultures, workforce, Tribal communities, and rural and remote service delivery. They wanted a program designed for Alaskans, by Alaskans.



A Shared Vision

Throughout the forums, one message remained consistent: Alaskans want a self-direction program that expands choice, respects individual decision-making, provides strong supports, and works in every community across the state. Participants encouraged policymakers to continue listening as planning moves forward because the strongest programs are built with the people who use them.

Executive Summary

Self-direction gives people another way to receive Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). It allows individuals to have more choice and control over how their approved services are planned and delivered while maintaining the health, safety, and accountability required by Medicaid.

During the summer of 2026, the Independent Living Center, in partnership with Senior and Disabilities Services and with funding from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, hosted statewide community forums to learn what Alaskans want in a self-directed Medicaid program.

The forums brought together people who receive services, family members, providers, direct support professionals, advocates, Tribal partners, care coordinators, and state staff. Some participants had experience with self-direction, while many were learning about it for the first time. Together, they shared ideas, asked questions, and discussed how self-direction could work in Alaska.

Although perspectives differed, participants shared a common vision. They wanted a self-direction program that expands choice, respects individual decision-making, provides strong supports, and reflects Alaska's unique communities and cultures.



What We Heard

Six themes were heard consistently across the state.



Choice

People want more options. Participants supported self-direction as another choice—not a replacement for traditional provider services. They emphasized that individuals should be able to choose the service model that best meets their needs and change options as their circumstances change.



Flexibility

Participants want services that fit people's lives. They support flexible schedules, greater choice in workers, and the ability to adjust services as needs change while maintaining accountability for Medicaid funding.



Keep It Simple

People asked for a program that is easy to understand and easy to use. They encouraged Alaska to reduce unnecessary paperwork, clearly explain program requirements, and make enrollment and ongoing participation as simple as possible.



Strong Supports

Participants agreed that self-direction works best when people have the right supports. Financial Management Services, person-centered planning, care coordination, training, peer support, and technical assistance were identified as essential to helping people succeed.



Workforce

Workforce shortages affect communities across Alaska. Participants believed self-direction could create more hiring flexibility, but they also emphasized that a strong provider network and continued investment in the direct support workforce remain essential.



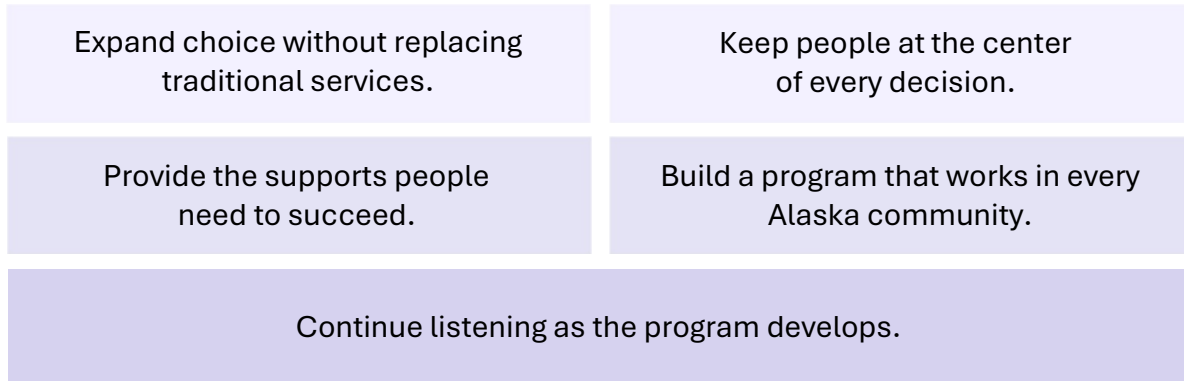
An Alaska Solution

Participants encouraged Alaska to learn from other states while designing a program that reflects Alaska's geography, cultures, Tribal communities, workforce, and rural service delivery. They wanted a program built for Alaska—not copied from somewhere else.

Looking Ahead

The community forums were the beginning of the conversation, not the end. Participants encouraged state leaders to continue engaging individuals, families, providers, advocates, Tribal partners, and community organizations throughout the planning process.

The message heard across Alaska was clear:



This report summarizes what was heard during the statewide forums and provides a foundation for future planning. The ideas shared by participants will help guide the development of a self-directed Medicaid program that reflects the needs, values, and priorities of Alaskans.

Why We Held These Forums

Self-direction gives people another way to receive Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). It allows individuals to have more choice and control over who provides their services, when services are delivered, and how approved supports fit into their daily lives. Self-direction is not a new service. It is another option for receiving Medicaid services.

As Alaska explores expanding self-direction, it is important to hear from the people who would use, provide, and support these services. The statewide community forums were designed to start that conversation.

The Independent Living Center, in partnership with Senior and Disabilities Services and with funding from the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, hosted forums across Alaska during the summer of 2026.

The purpose was to:

- Provide clear, unbiased information about self-direction.
- Listen to the experiences and ideas of Alaskans.
- Identify opportunities, concerns, and priorities.
- Gather community input to help guide future planning.

The forums were not intended to make policy decisions or recommend a specific program model. Instead, they gave participants an opportunity to learn about self-direction, ask questions, and share what they believe would make a successful program for Alaska.

Who Participated

The forums brought together a wide range of people from communities across the state, including:

People who receive Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services	Family members and caregivers	Direct support professionals
Service providers	Care coordinators	Independent Living Center staff
Disability advocates	Tribal partners	State staff and other community stakeholders

Some participants had firsthand experience with self-direction, while many were learning about it for the first time. The mix of perspectives created thoughtful discussions about both the opportunities and the challenges of expanding self-direction in Alaska.



Understanding Self-Direction: Another Way to Receive Services

Self-direction is another way to receive Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). It gives people more choice and control over how their approved services are planned and delivered.

Instead of relying on a provider agency to make most day-to-day decisions, people can take a more active role in directing their own services. Depending on the program, they may choose who provides their services, when services are delivered, and how approved supports fit into their daily lives.

Self-direction is **not** a new Medicaid service. It is another option for receiving services that are already available.

Self-Direction Is About Choice

One message was heard throughout the forums: **the best system is one that provides people options.**

Self-direction is not the right choice for everyone, and participants agreed it should never replace traditional provider services. Some people prefer to receive services through an agency. Others want the flexibility that self-direction can provide.

Participants consistently supported a system where people can choose the option that best meets their needs and change options as their circumstances change.



What Stays the Same?

Although self-direction changes who makes many day-to-day decisions, the basic Medicaid requirements do not change.

People must still:

- Meet Medicaid eligibility requirements.
- Qualify for Home and Community-Based Services.
- Receive services based on assessed needs.
- Participate in person-centered planning.
- Follow program rules designed to protect health, safety, and accountability.

Self-direction does not reduce oversight. It changes how approved services are managed while maintaining the safeguards required under Medicaid.

What Changes?

With self-direction, individuals may have greater authority to:

- Choose who provides their services.
- Decide when services are delivered.
- Schedule supports around work, school, family, and community activities.
- Hire workers who understand their needs and preferences.
- Manage an approved service budget within program guidelines.

The amount of responsibility varies from person to person. Some people choose to direct many aspects of their services, while others rely on family members, representatives, or trusted professionals for support.

Support Makes Self-Direction Successful

Self-direction does not mean doing everything alone.

Participants consistently said that people need the right supports to be successful. The level of support should match each person's needs and goals.

Important supports include:

- Financial Management Services to handle payroll, taxes, and other administrative responsibilities.
- Person-centered planning to identify goals and develop support plans.
- Care coordination to connect people with services and community resources.
- Training for participants, families, and direct support workers.
- Peer mentoring and technical assistance from people with experience in self-direction.

Many participants also discussed the value of support brokers or similar roles to help people understand their options, solve problems, and confidently manage their services.

Self-Direction Across the Country

Every state now offers at least one self-direction option through its Medicaid HCBS programs. While programs differ from state to state, they all share the same goal: giving people more choice and control over their services while protecting health, safety, and accountability.

Participants encouraged Alaska to learn from other states but not simply copy another program. They wanted Alaska to build a model that reflects its own communities, cultures, geography, workforce, and service system.

What Self-Direction Is Not

Throughout the forums, participants wanted to clear up several common misunderstandings.

Self-direction is **not**:

- A reduction in Medicaid services.
- A replacement for provider agencies.
- The right choice for everyone.
- A way to eliminate accountability or oversight.
- A requirement for people receiving HCBS.

Instead, self-direction expands the options available so people can choose the service model that works best for them.

"Nothing about me without me."

Participants repeatedly emphasized that people who receive services should have a meaningful voice in decisions about their lives. Self-direction is built on person-centered planning, individual choice, and the belief that people are the experts on their own lives.



Listening Across Alaska

Each community forum was different, but the message was remarkably consistent. Participants came from across Alaska with different backgrounds and experiences. Some had firsthand experience with self-direction, while many were learning about it for the first time.

People did not always agree on how a self-direction program should be designed. However, they shared common values and priorities that should guide future planning.

Six themes emerged in each of the forums.

Theme 1: Choice

People Want More Options

The strongest message heard throughout the forums was simple:

"The best system is one that provides people options."

Participants supported self-direction because it gives people another choice for receiving services. They emphasized that no single service model works for everyone. Some people prefer services through a provider agency, while others want the flexibility that self-direction offers.

Participants consistently said that people should be able to choose the option that best meets their needs and move between service models as their circumstances change.

Participants said choice includes:

- Choosing whether to self-direct.
- Choosing who provides services.
- Choosing when services are delivered.
- Choosing how approved services fit into everyday life.
- Choosing to remain with traditional provider services.

Choice was viewed as the foundation of person-centered services and greater independence. Participants want a system that expands opportunities without taking away existing services. Self-direction should create more choices, not fewer.

Theme 2: Flexibility

Services Should Fit People's Lives

Participants described flexibility as one of the greatest benefits of self-direction.

People explained that life does not always fit into fixed schedules. Work, school, family responsibilities, medical appointments, weather, transportation, and seasonal activities all affect when supports are needed.

Participants wanted a system that allows services to adapt as life changes.

Examples included:

- Flexible schedules.
- Hiring workers who know and understand the individual.
- Adjusting services when needs change.
- Finding creative solutions to meet personal goals.
- Supporting participation in work, school, and community life.

Participants encouraged Alaska to allow as much flexibility as possible while maintaining accountability for Medicaid services.

"People have a right to risk. There is dignity in risk."

Many participants discussed balancing personal choice with health and safety. They believed safeguards should protect people without unnecessarily limiting independence or self-determination.



Theme 3: Keep It Simple

Make the Program Easy to Use

One of the clearest messages throughout the forums was that simplicity matters.

Participants want a program that is easy to understand, easy to access, and easy to manage.

Many shared experiences with confusing paperwork, changing requirements, and complicated processes that made services harder to use.

Participants encouraged Alaska to build a program with:

- Plain-language materials.
- Clear expectations.
- Simple enrollment.
- Reasonable documentation.
- Consistent information.
- Easy access to help when questions arise.

People believed accountability and simplicity can exist together.

Participants want the program to spend less time on paperwork and more time supporting people.



Theme 4: Strong Supports

Success Depends on Good Supports

Participants agreed that self-direction should never mean managing services alone.

People consistently said that individuals and families need access to information, training, and ongoing support.

The supports mentioned most often included:

- Financial Management Services.
- Person-centered planning.
- Care coordination.
- Training for participants and families.
- Training for direct support workers.
- Peer mentoring.
- Technical assistance and problem-solving support.

Many participants also supported having support brokers or similar professionals available for people who want additional guidance.

Support should be flexible. Some people may need very little assistance, while others may need ongoing help.

"Nothing about me without me."

Participants emphasized that people who receive services should remain at the center of every decision. Supports should help people direct their own lives, not make decisions for them.





Theme 5: Workforce

A Strong Workforce Benefits Everyone

Workforce shortages were discussed in every community.

Participants described the challenges of finding and keeping qualified workers, especially in rural communities and for people with complex support needs.

Many believed self-direction could expand hiring options by allowing people to recruit workers from their own families, communities, and personal networks.

At the same time, participants were clear that self-direction alone will not solve Alaska's workforce challenges.

A strong provider network remains essential for people who choose traditional services and for specialized supports.

Theme 6: An Alaska Solution

Build a Program for Alaska

Participants welcomed the opportunity to learn from other states but consistently said Alaska should build its own program.

"Alaska has to build an Alaska program."

Participants described many reasons why Alaska's program should be different. The state's geography, Tribal communities, workforce challenges, transportation systems, weather, and rural service delivery create unique opportunities and challenges.

Rather than copying another state's model, participants encouraged Alaska to build on national best practices while designing a program that reflects the realities of living and receiving services in Alaska.

Common Vision

Although participants differed on some details, they shared a common vision for the future.

They want a self-direction program that:

- Expands choice without replacing traditional services.
- Gives people a meaningful voice in decisions about their lives.
- Balances flexibility with accountability.
- Provides strong supports for participants and families.
- Strengthens the direct support workforce.
- Works in urban, rural, and remote communities.
- Reflects Alaska's unique values and way of life.

The conversations across the state made one thing clear: **Alaskans are ready to help build a self-direction program that works for Alaska.**



Moving from Community Input to Program Design

The statewide forums were designed to listen, learn, and begin a conversation about self-direction in Alaska. While participants did not expect every decision to be made during the forums, they identified several priorities that should guide future planning.

Participants encouraged Alaska to build on successful ideas from other states while designing a program that reflects Alaska's unique communities, geography, cultures, and service system. They emphasized that people who receive services, families, providers, advocates, Tribal partners, and community organizations should continue to be involved throughout the planning process.

Design Considerations

Although participants expressed different opinions about specific program features, there was broad agreement on several important considerations.

Expand Choice

Participants supported making self-direction available as another option for receiving Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services. Traditional provider services should remain available so people can choose the approach that best meets their needs.

Build Flexible Supports

Participants said people need different levels of support to be successful. Financial Management Services, person-centered planning, care coordination, training, peer support, and technical assistance should be flexible and responsive to individual needs.

Develop Fair and Understandable Budgets

Many participants wanted to learn more about how individual budgets would be developed. They emphasized that budgets should be fair, transparent, based on individual needs, and flexible enough to support personal goals while maintaining accountability for Medicaid funding.

Strengthen the Workforce

Participants recognized that workforce shortages affect every service model. They encouraged Alaska to continue investing in recruitment, retention, training, and career development for direct support professionals while exploring how self-direction can expand hiring opportunities.



Design for All of Alaska

Participants repeatedly noted that programs developed for large urban states may not work in Alaska. They encouraged planners to consider the needs of rural communities, Tribal communities, and areas where provider resources are limited. Flexibility will be essential to ensuring people have meaningful access to services regardless of where they live.

Continuing the Conversation

Participants viewed these forums as the beginning of a longer conversation. They encouraged state leaders to continue working with the people who receive services, their families, providers, advocates, Tribal partners, and community organizations as self-direction is explored.

They also encouraged Alaska to evaluate the program over time by looking beyond participation numbers. Success should be measured by outcomes that matter to people's lives, including:

- Participant choice and satisfaction
- Access to needed services
- Workforce stability
- Health and safety
- Community participation
- Quality of life

Participants emphasized that the strongest programs continue to improve by listening to the people who use them.



Conclusion

The community forums demonstrated strong interest in expanding opportunities for people who receive Home and Community-Based Services.

While participants differed on some program details, they shared a common vision. They want a self-direction program that expands choice, respects individual decision-making, provides strong supports, and reflects Alaska's unique communities and values.

Throughout the forums, four messages were heard again and again:

"The best system is one that provides people options."

"Nothing about me without me."

"People have a right to risk. There is dignity in risk."

"Alaska has to build an Alaska program."

These statements capture the values that participants believe should guide the development of self-directed Medicaid services in Alaska.

The conversations summarized in this report are an important first step. As planning continues, participants encouraged Alaska to keep listening, keep learning, and continue building a program with the people who will use, support, and strengthen it.

To provide input on an Alaska self-direction model of service, please email us at:

selfdirection@alaskasilc.org

