



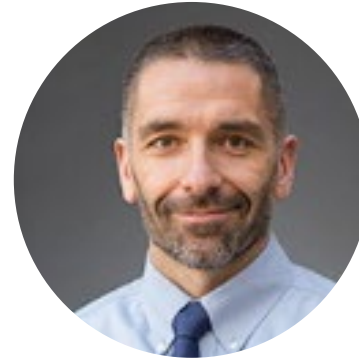
# Public Health Leadership in Times of Crisis

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Ann Zink, MD

Chief Medical Officer,  
State of Alaska



Robert Onders, MD

Medical Director,  
Alaska Native Tribal  
Health Consortium

# Question for the Viewers



Rate your level of agreement with the following statement:

“Leaders in my state have been responsive to current public health crises.”

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Disagree
- D. Strongly disagree
- E. Neither agree nor disagree
- F. Other (please type in chat)

## Lessons from Alaska

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## Understanding Health Equity in Leadership

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## Challenges and Strategies for Leading

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A black and white photograph of a rural Alaskan village. In the foreground, a person carrying a child in a carrier and a child in a patterned snowsuit walk along a dirt path. To the left is a long, light-colored building with a corrugated metal roof and several windows. A wooden fence runs along the path. In the background, more houses and utility poles are visible under a cloudy sky. The right side of the image is overlaid with a solid red color.

# Lessons from Alaska

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# Personal Background



**Key lesson learned from emergency medical experience:**

*In the Emergency Department – all public policy comes to fail*

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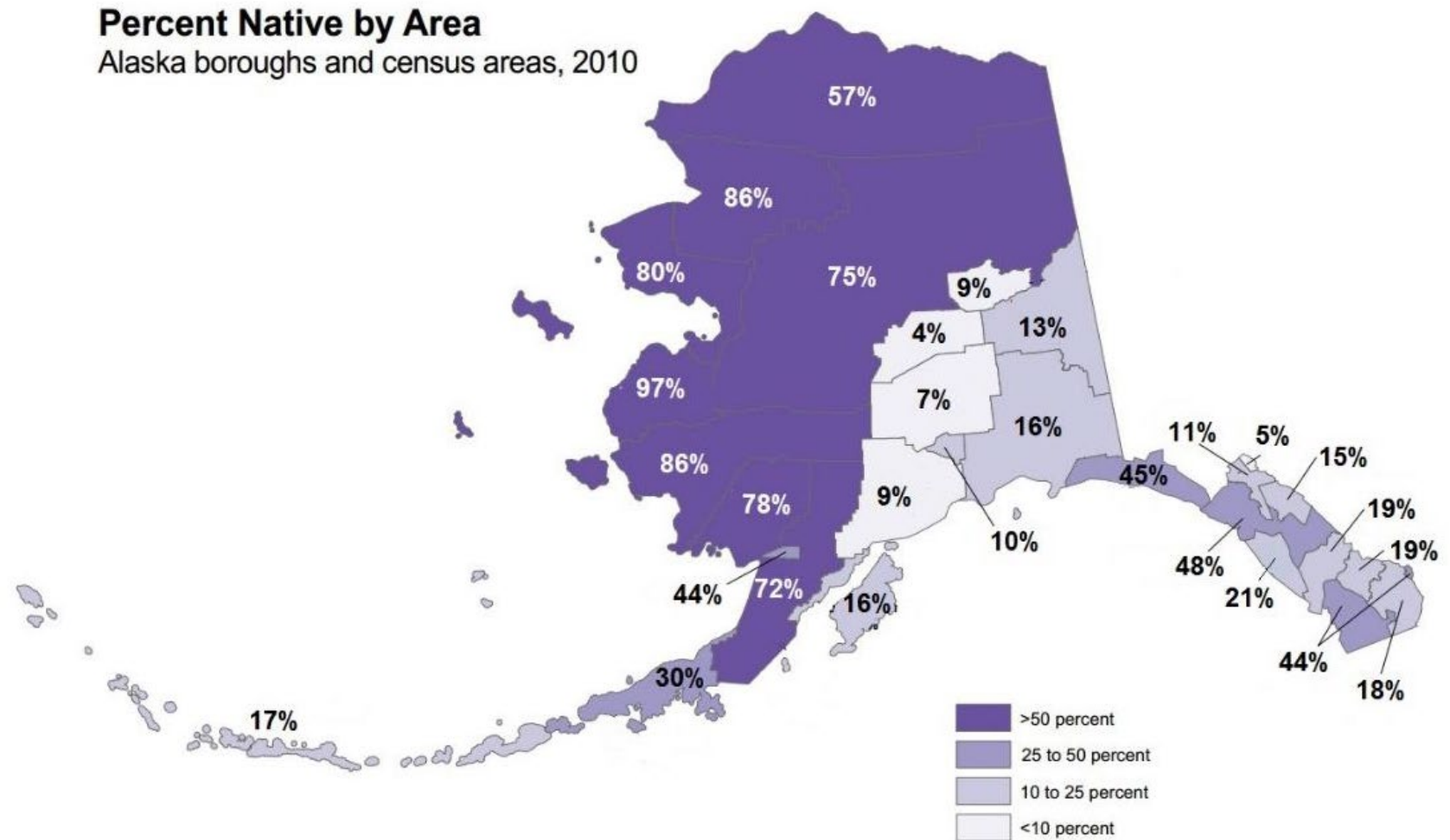
# Alaska in Context



**Alaska is a state with great geographic and human diversity**

# Alaska in Context: Indigenous Communities

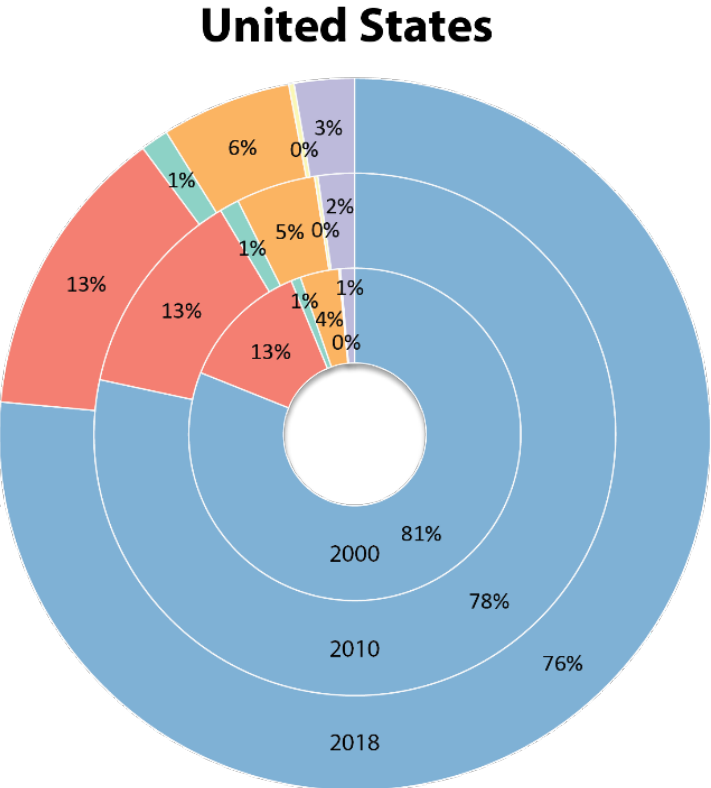
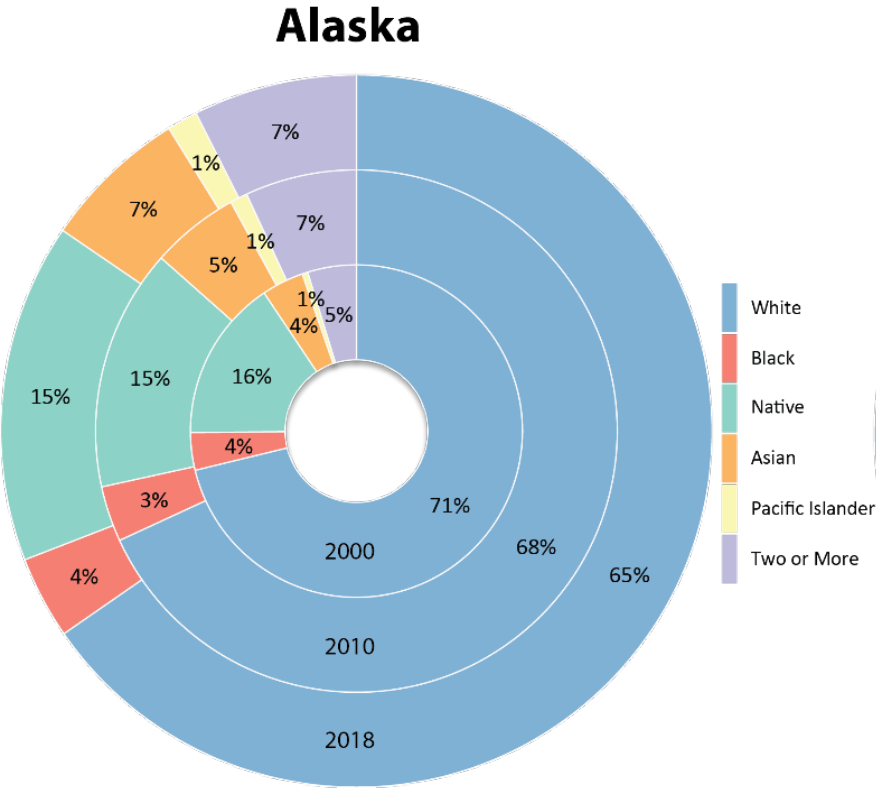
- **229** of the 566 federally recognized tribes are in Alaska
- **1/5<sup>th</sup> of population** is Alaska Native
- **Villages** range from 12-3,000 residents



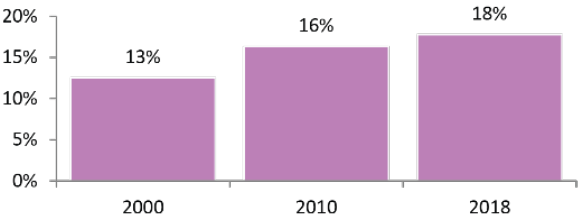
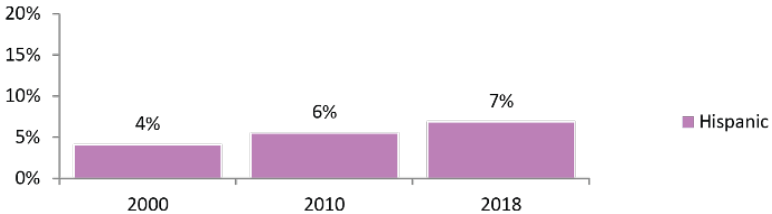
Note: These are "bridged" race estimates, which adjust data from surveys that allow reporting of more than one race group (such as the 2000 and 2010 censuses) so that each respondent is assigned a single race. Data on race alone and race alone or in combination with other races are available at [labor.alaska.gov/research](http://labor.alaska.gov/research).

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

# Alaska in Context: State Demographics



State demographics reflect an **increasingly diverse population**



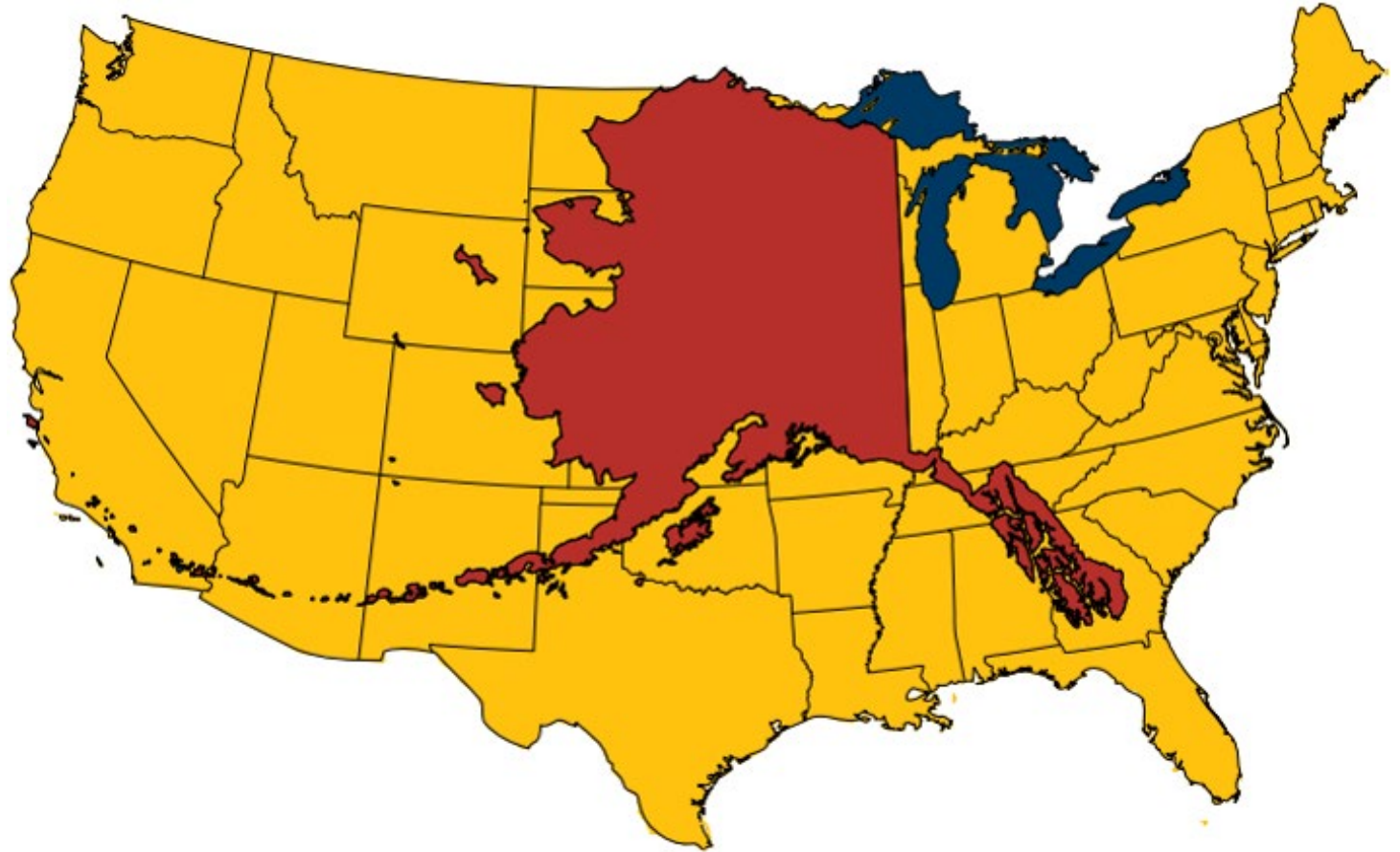
Percentage by Race 2000–2018

Source: State of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Anchorage Population and Economic Data Conference



# Alaska in Context: Geography

- **Larger than combined area of next 3 largest states:** Texas, California, and Montana
- **Least densely populated state, home to 229 remote villages**
- **“Remoteness” by Access**
  - Small plane: 60%
  - Jet: 11%
  - Highway and jet: 8%
  - Limited road and small plane: 8%
  - Jet, then small plane: 6%
  - Highway: 3%
  - “Extremely Remote”: 3%



# Alaska in Context: Infrastructure

- **90% of communities** off the road system
- Food, gasoline, other necessities are **expensive/in short supply**, residents rely on subsistence hunting
- **At least 75 communities** in Alaska lack any law enforcement presence at all
- **Most villages** lack regular access to police, courts, and related services



Source: Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

# Health of Alaskans

In the Alaskan context, there is a strong connection between health, income, place, and race.



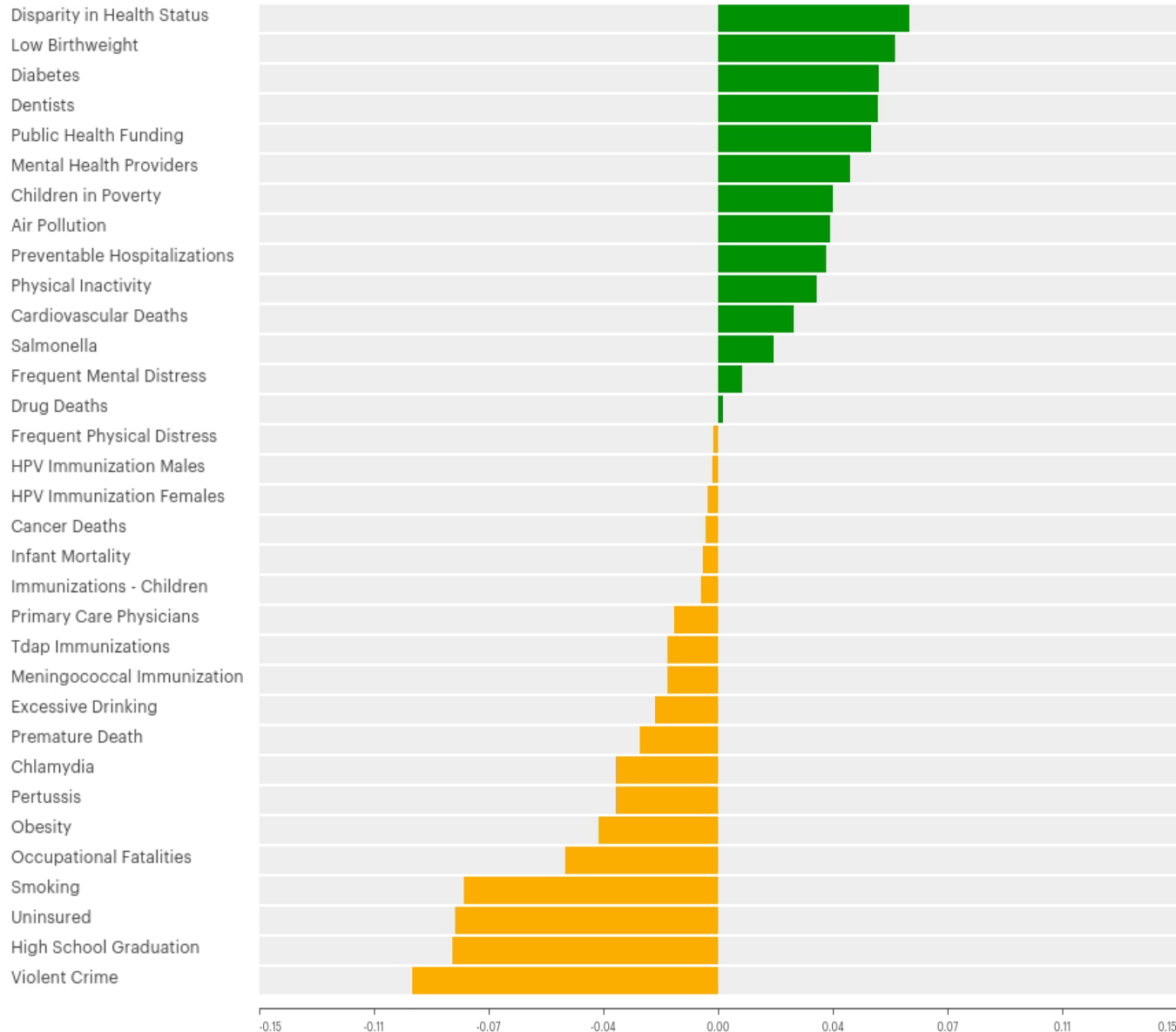
# Understanding Health Equity in Leadership

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# Health of Alaskans



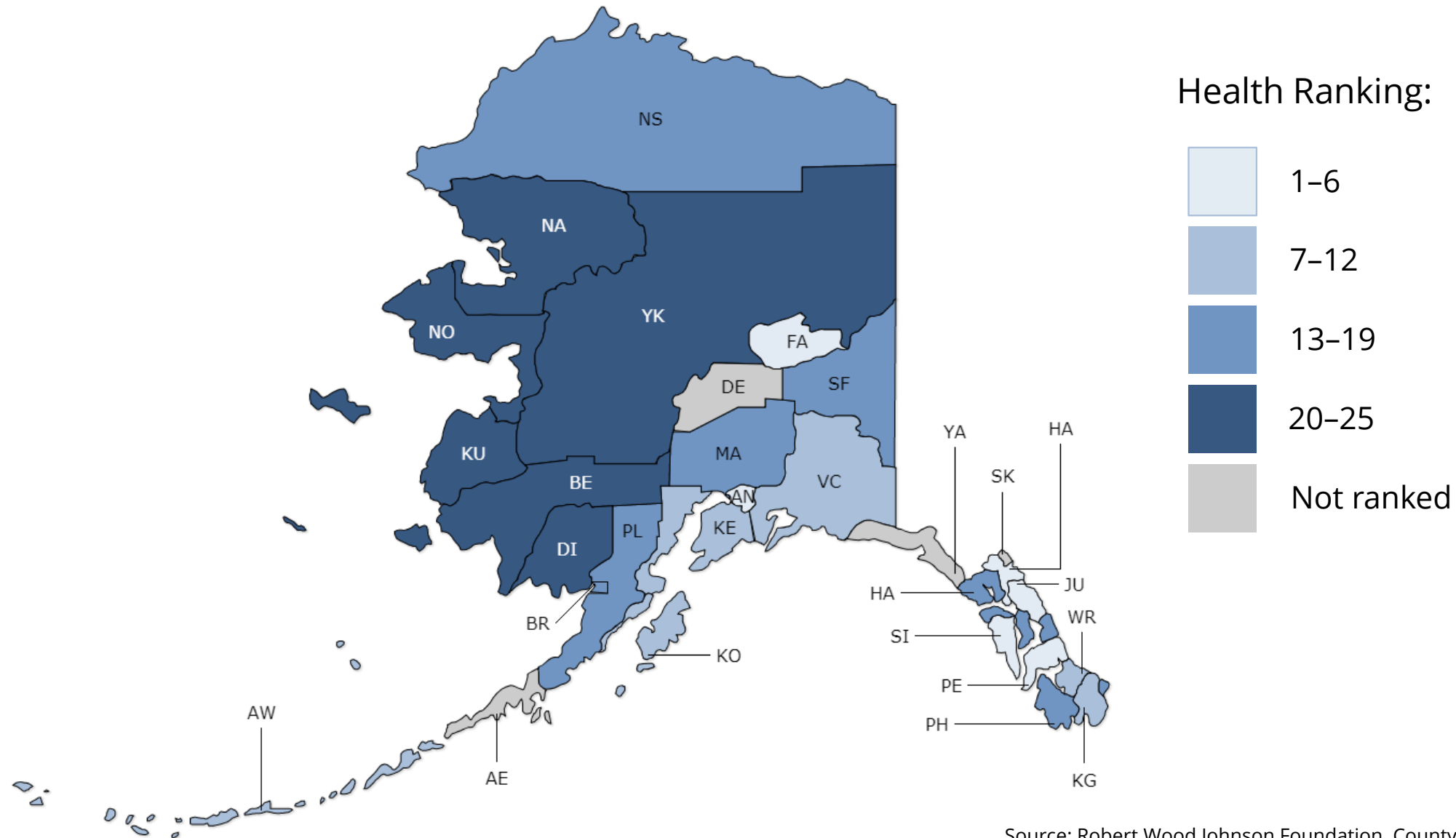
Alaska ranks **better** than other states in the US:

- Low birthweight
- Diabetes
- Children in poverty
- Drug deaths

Alaska ranks **worse** than other states in the US:

- Violent crime
- Smoking
- Excess drinking
- Obesity
- Occupational fatalities
- STIs
- Pertussis

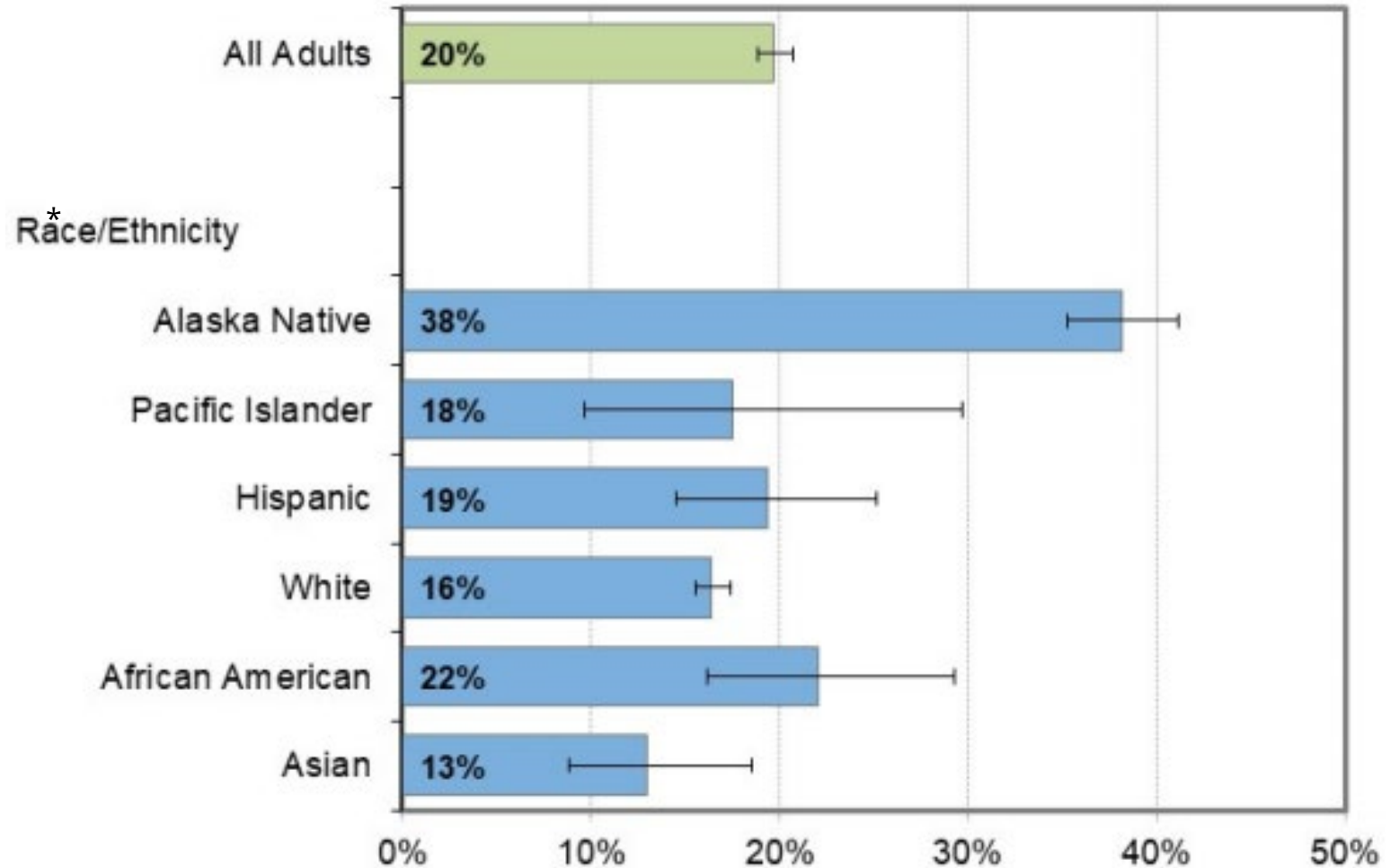
# Health Factors by "County," 2019



Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, County Health Rankings:  
[www.countyhealthrankings.org/reports/state-reports/2019-alaska-report](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/reports/state-reports/2019-alaska-report)

# Racial Inequities: Smoking

## Percentage of Adults Who Smoke, by Race/Ethnicity, Alaska, 2015–2017



\* Note: The race categories of African American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and White do not include respondents of Hispanic ethnicity. Percentages reported in this graph are for 2015–2017 combined, and may differ from those reported elsewhere for 2017 only.

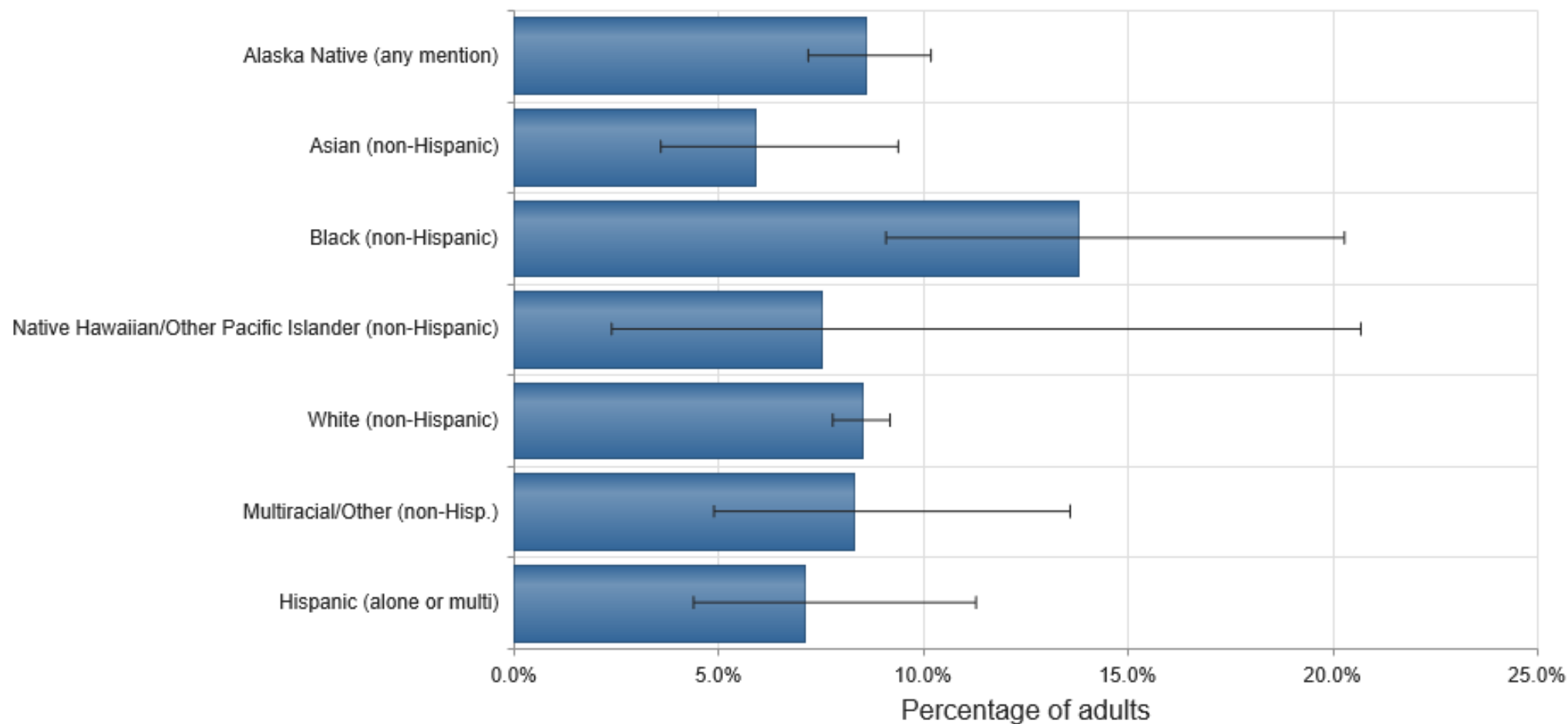
Source: Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Combined File

# Racial Inequities: Diabetes

## Percentage of Alaskan adults (18+) with diabetes

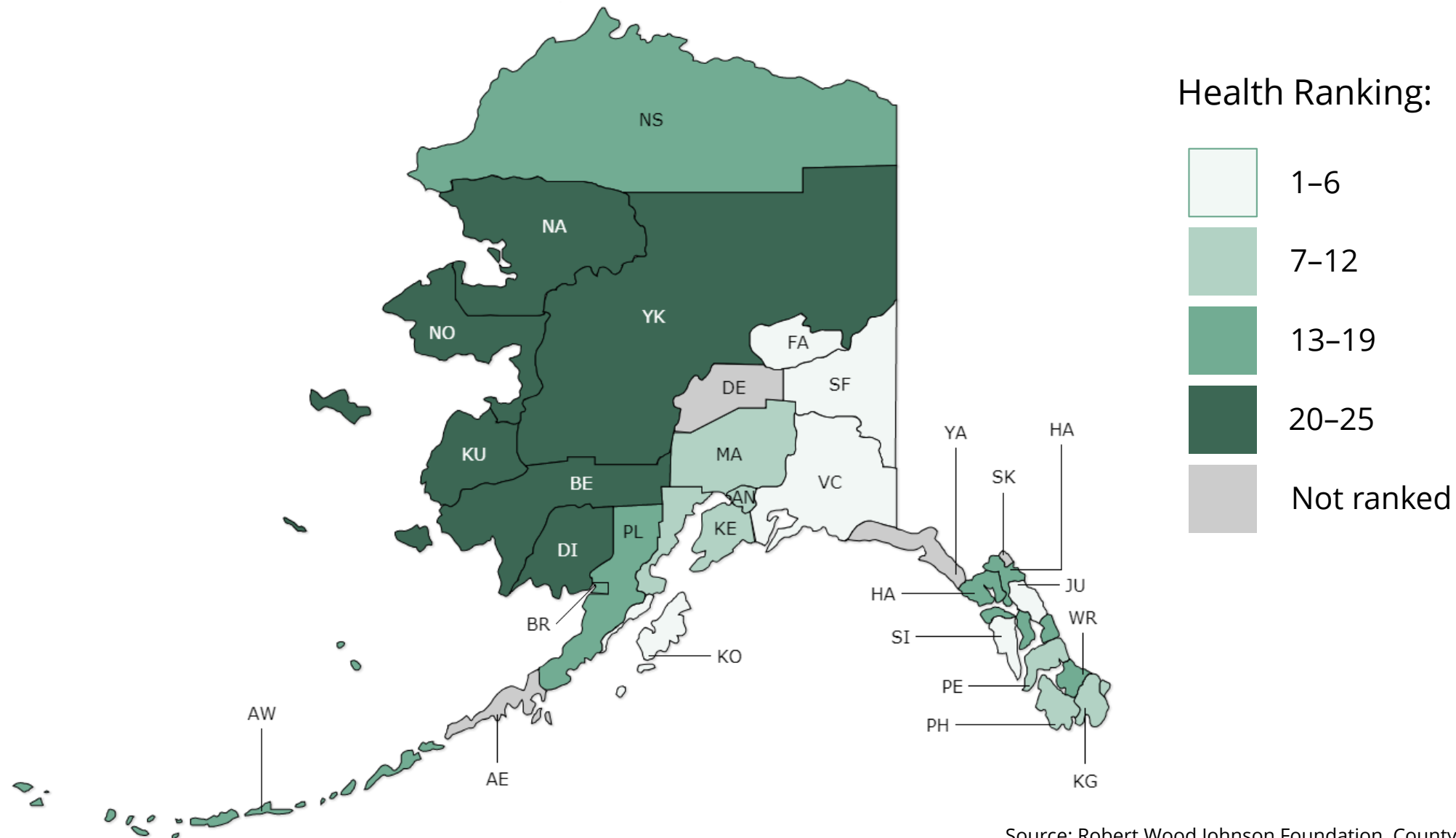
*Crude rate by race/ethnicity, 2016–2018 (3-year average)*

Source: Alaska IBIS, Diabetes Program,  
Section of Chronic Disease Prevention  
and Health Promotion





# Health Outcomes by “County,” 2019

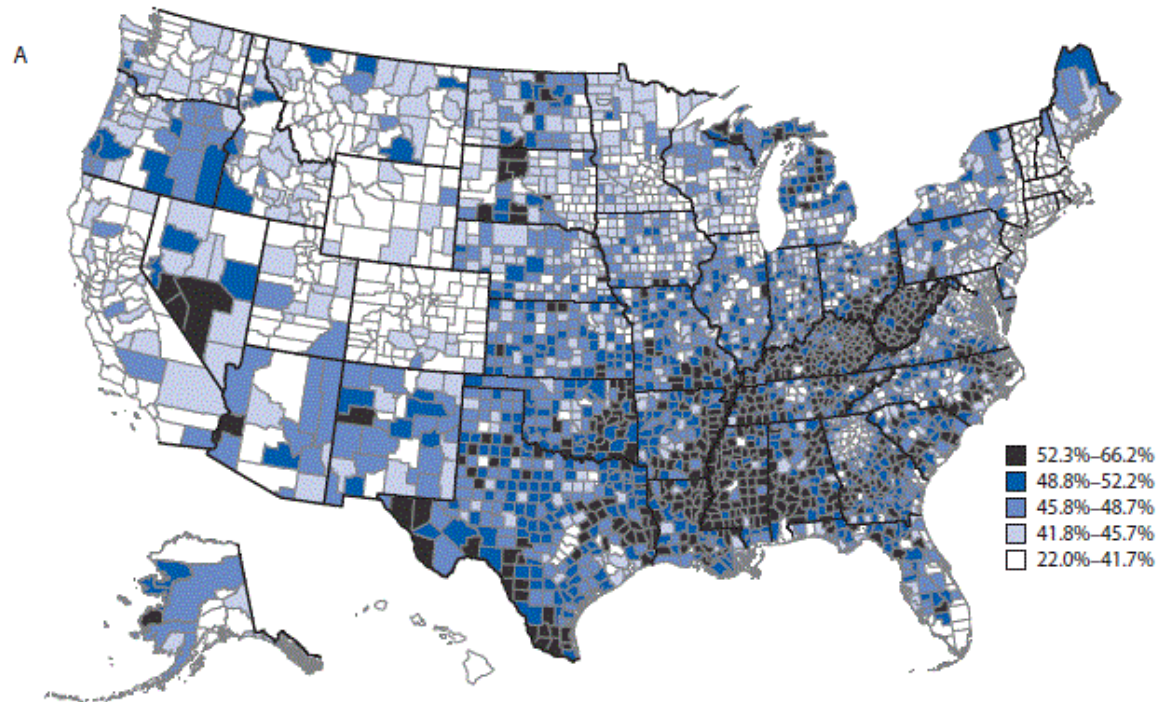


Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, County Health Rankings:  
[www.countyhealthrankings.org/reports/state-reports/2019-alaska-report](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/reports/state-reports/2019-alaska-report)

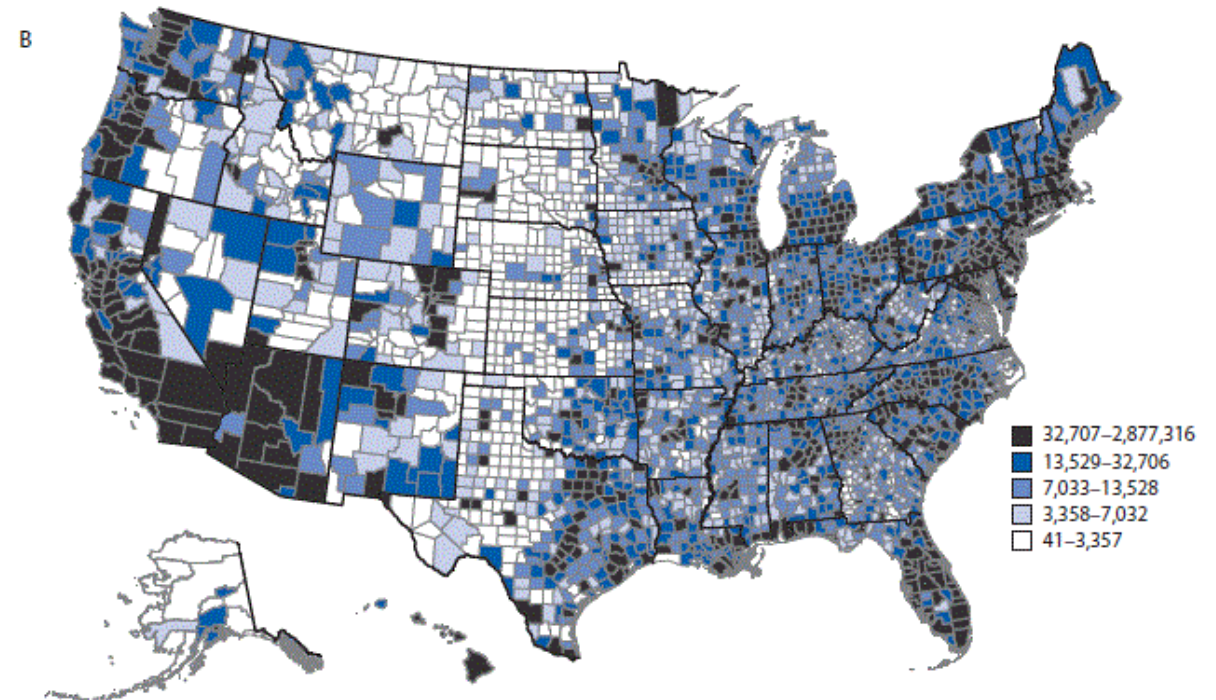
# Prevalence of Medically Underlying Conditions

Risk of COVID complications **due to underlying medical conditions**, by:

Percentage of people



Number of people



# Historical and Ongoing Systemic Trauma

The colonization of Alaska, recent history and political and economic and social systems play a major role in the health of its indigenous communities

Cemetery in Kivalina, a village in the Northwest Arctic. Generations of Alaska Native children endured abuse at the hands of religious and educational authorities, along with Alaska Native people experiencing land dispossession, voter disenfranchisement, and threats to their traditional and customary use of traditional food sources

# 1918 Influenza Pandemic



A historical photograph of Doctor Linus Hiram French meeting orphans of the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1919

Source: Tim Troll from the Peninsula Clarion



# Tuberculosis, 1700's - present



Alaskan Native home care facility  
for treatment of tuberculosis

Source: National Library of Medicine: [www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/481.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/481.html)

A photograph of a man and two children on a red ATV. The man, wearing a dark jacket, glasses, and a cap, is driving. A young girl in a grey hoodie and pink pants is sitting on the back, smiling. Another child is partially visible behind her. The background shows a white building and a dirt area. A blue diagonal overlay covers the right side of the image, containing the title text.

# Challenges and Strategies for Leading

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# Alaska's Approach to Health Care

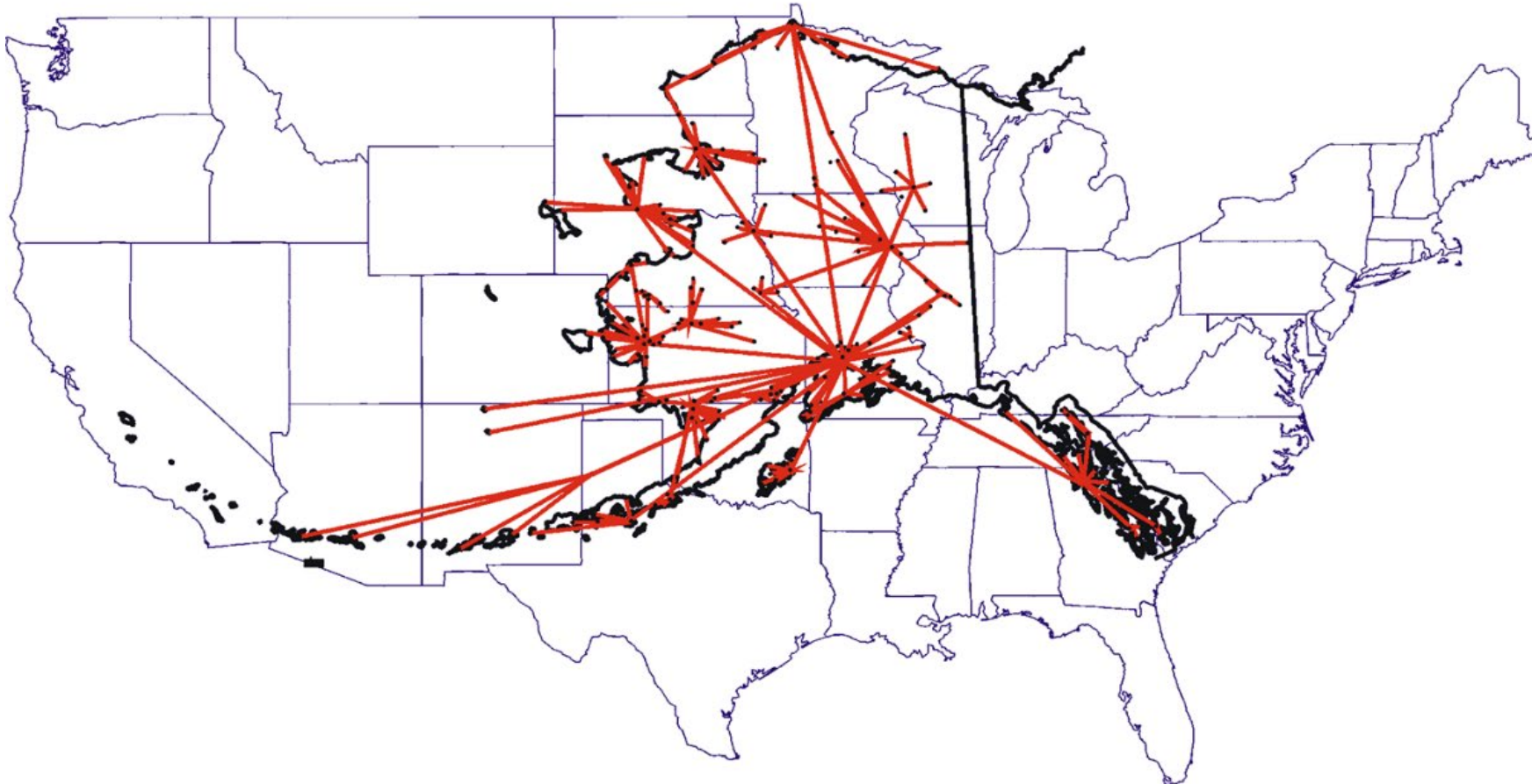


Health care is complicated and will always be imperfect, but how we structure our care is the next wave of medical transformation.



# Access to Care in Indigenous Communities

## Alaska Native Health Care System Referral Pattern and Telehealth Network





# The Importance of Telehealth



Telehealth is an especially important source of care delivery in Alaska, particularly rural communities

# The Role of the Military

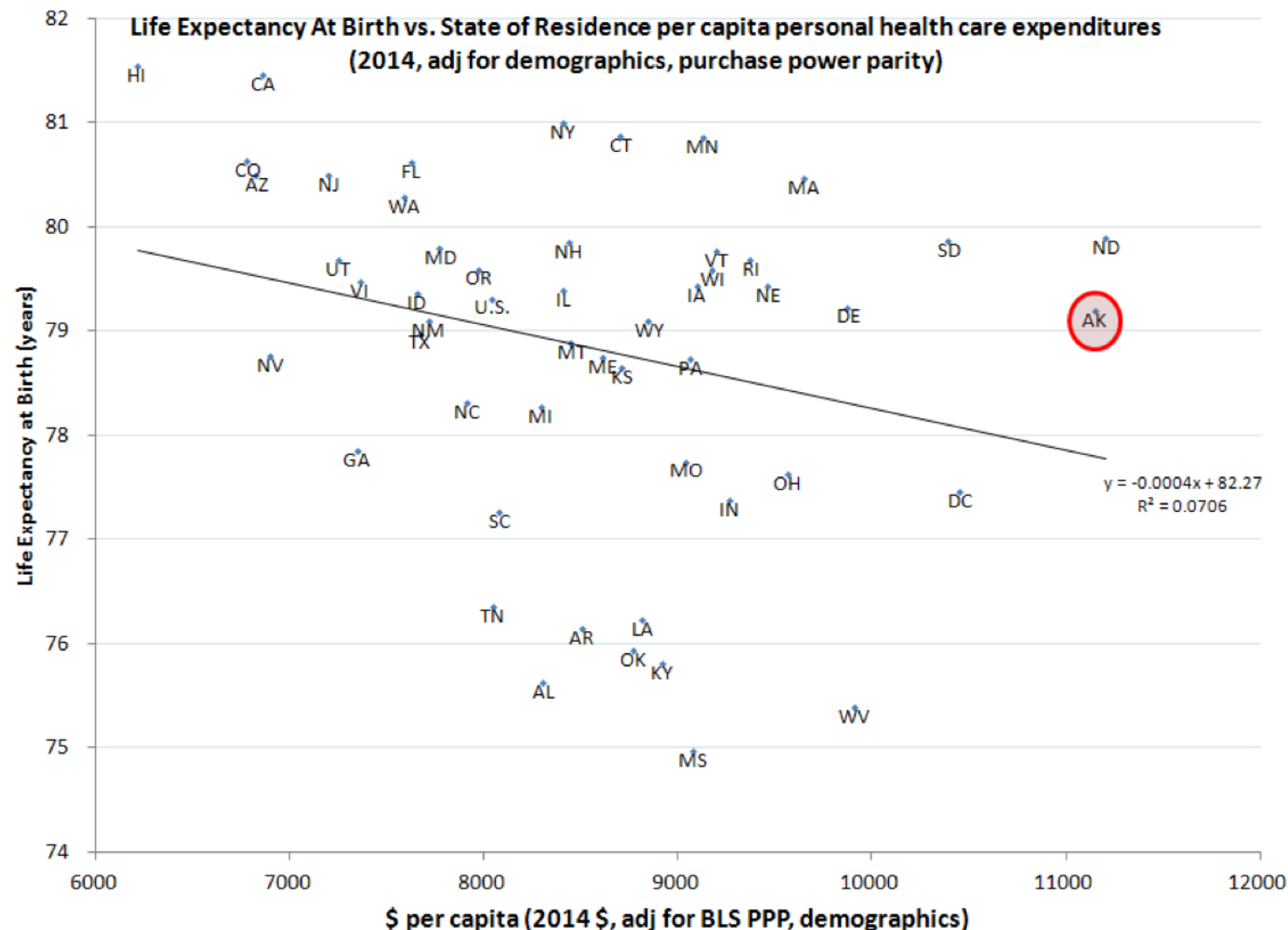


The US Coast Guard is an important partner  
in care delivery for remote communities

# Health Care Expenditures and Health Outcomes

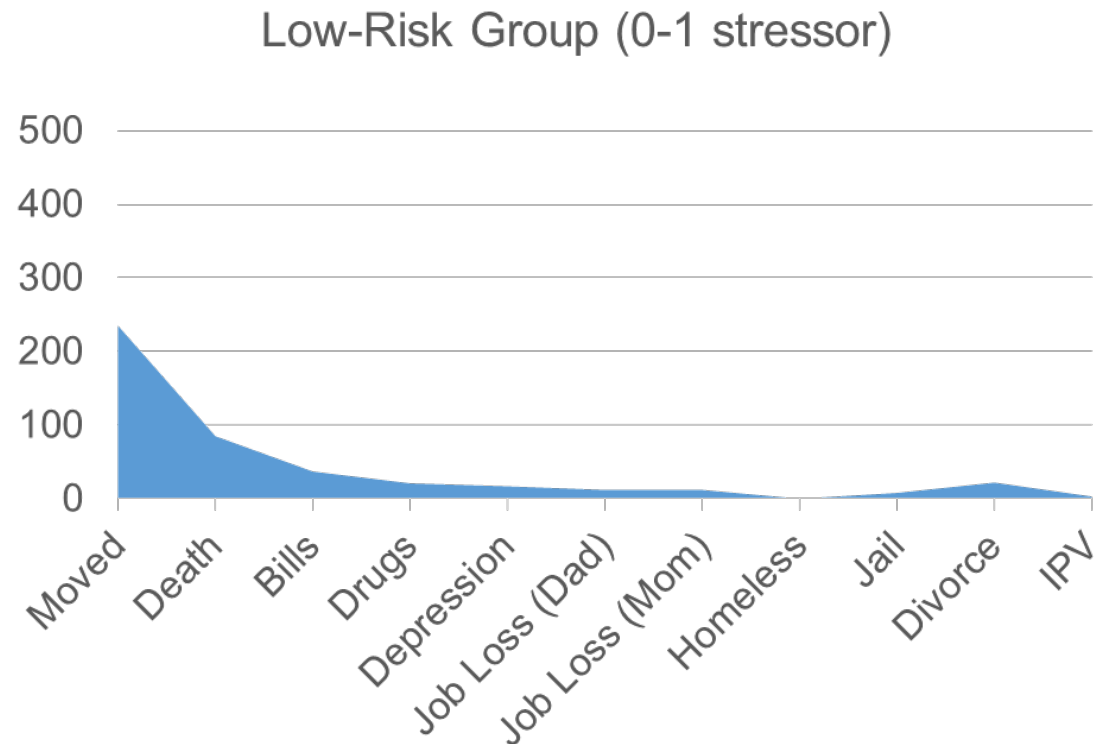
## Health Care in Alaska is very expensive

- There is an inverse relationship between personal health care expenditures and life expectancy
- High healthcare costs are often significantly downstream of the cause of a health problem



# 1115 Behavioral Health Waiver

**The goal of the project** is to provide a vehicle for strengthening the support system for at risk youth and their families to prevent crises and keep families whole and healthy.



# Alaska and COVID-19: Vulnerable Communities

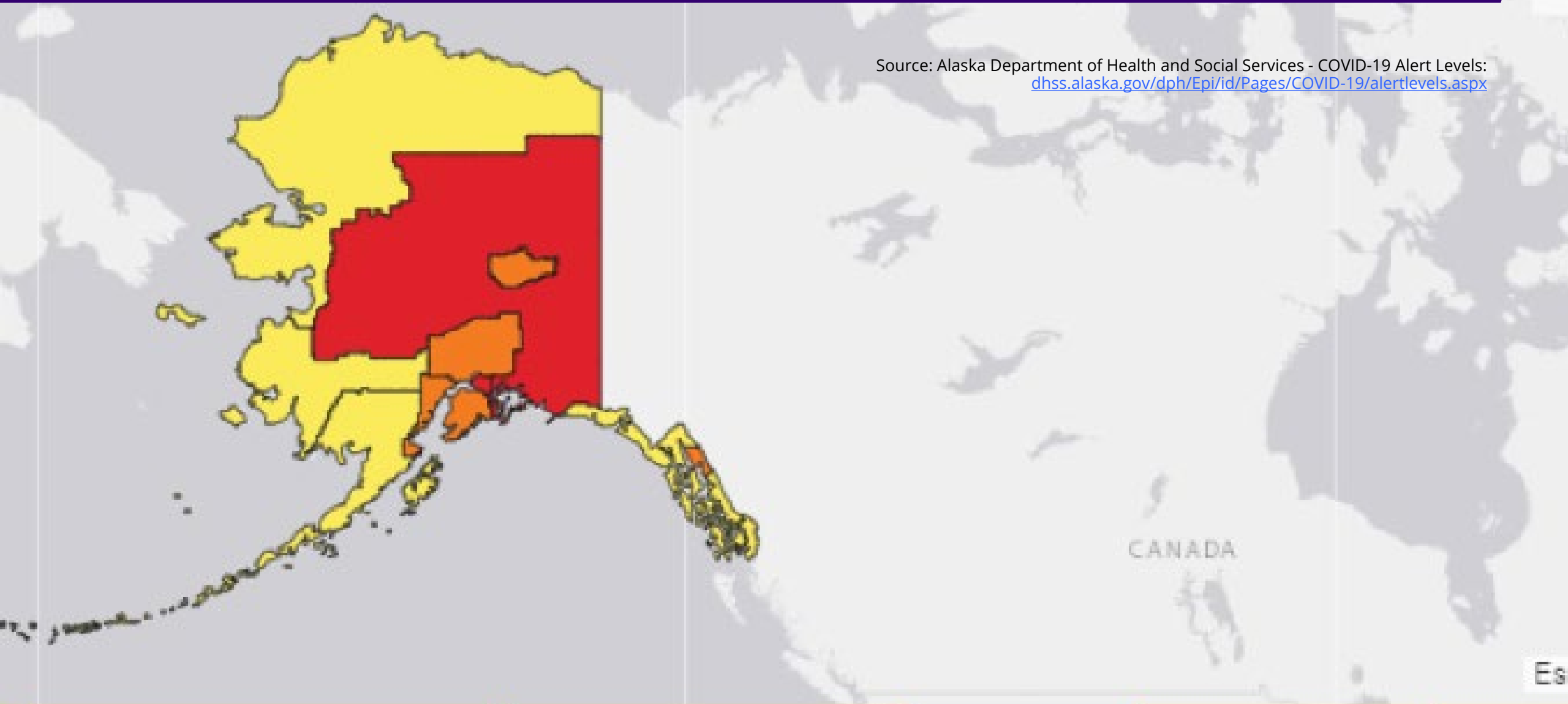


Alaska Department of Health and Social Services staff at the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) – [ykhc.org](https://ykhc.org)



# Alaska and COVID-19: Alert Levels by Region

Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services - COVID-19 Alert Levels:  
[dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/alertlevels.aspx](https://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/COVID-19/alertlevels.aspx)



New Cases Rate (7-Day Avg)

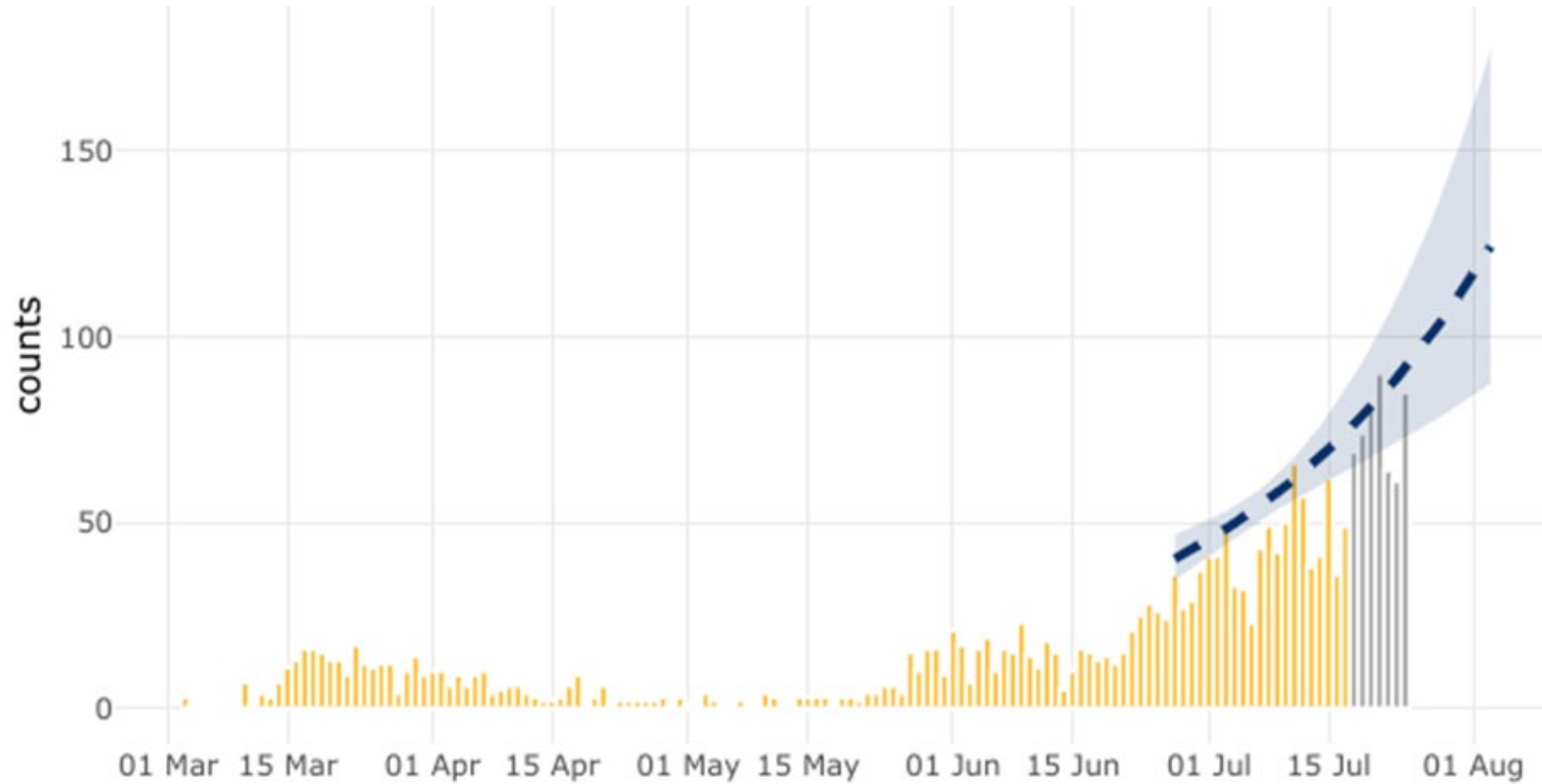
Cumulative Cases Map

Alert Levels

Lab Testing Map

# Alaska and COVID-19: Alert Levels by Region

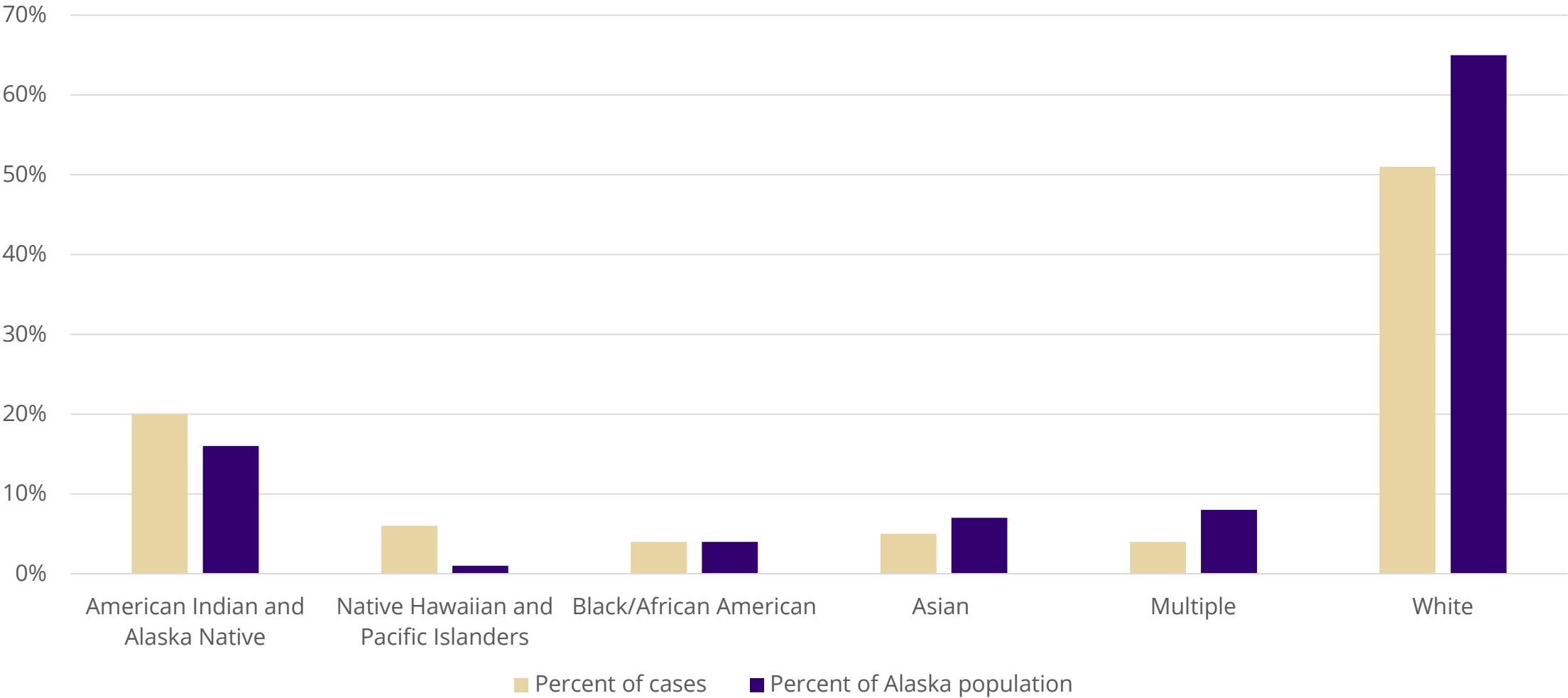
## Epidemic curve by onset date, Alaska



Log-linear model: Short term forecast with 95% confidence band

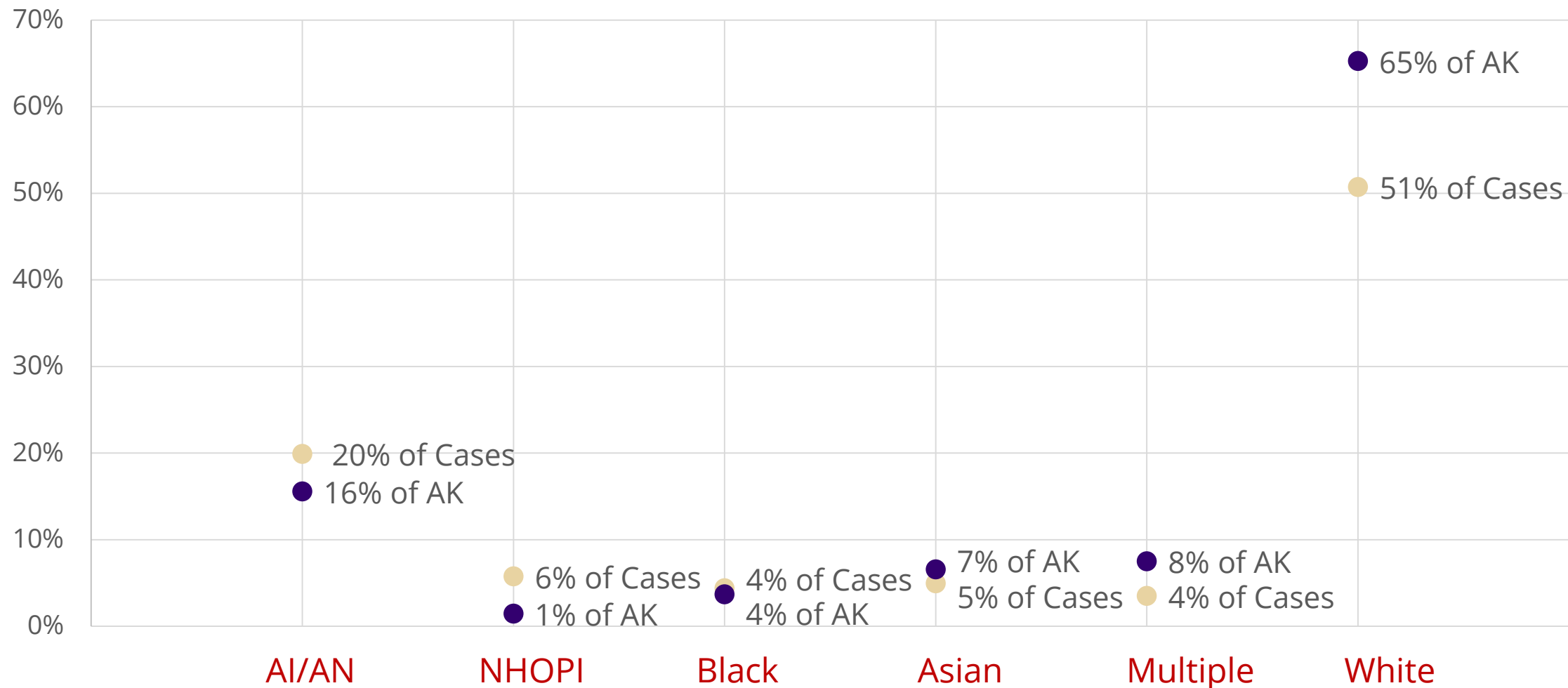
\*Note: Analyses truncated by 7 days (gray bars) due to delay in reporting, resulting in incomplete data

# Alaska and COVID-19: Total Cases by Race



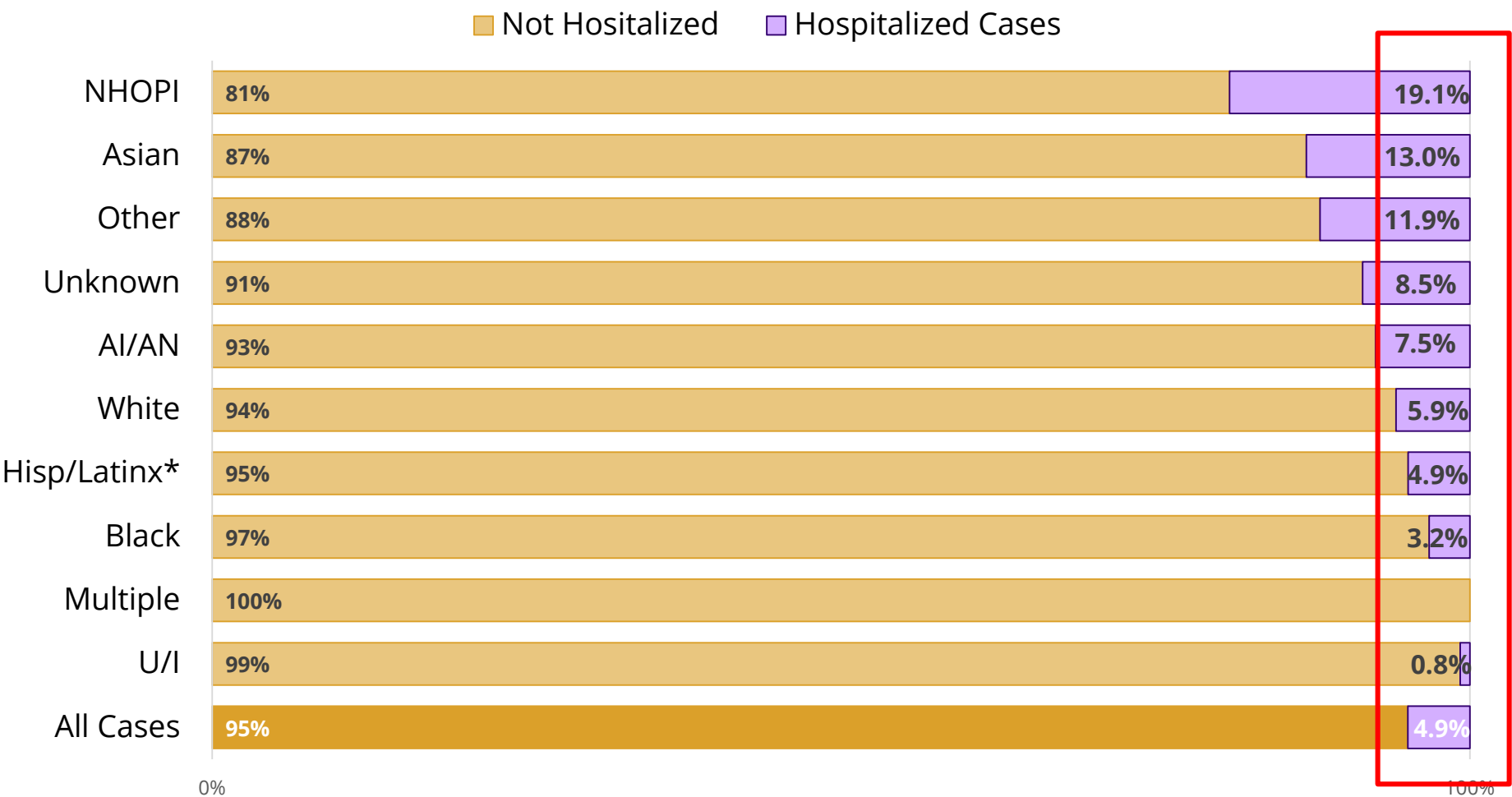
Source: State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health

# Does distribution of cases reflect population distribution?



Source: State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Health Analytics and Vital Records

# Is severity different by race and ethnicity?



Source - State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Health Analytics and Vital Records



# Alaska and COVID-19: Deaths by Race

Race	Hospitalizations		Deaths	
	Number	Percentage	People	Percentage
<b>AIAN</b>	24	21	8	36
<b>Asian</b>	10	9	2	9
<b>Black or African American</b>	2	2	0	0
<b>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</b>	17	15	1	5
<b>Other Race</b>	5	4	0	0
<b>unknown/blank</b>	11	9	0	0
<b>White</b>	47	41	11	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>116</b>		<b>22</b>	

Source - State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Epidemiology

# COVID-19 Inequities in Vulnerable Communities

## Racial/ethnic minorities and non-native English speakers:

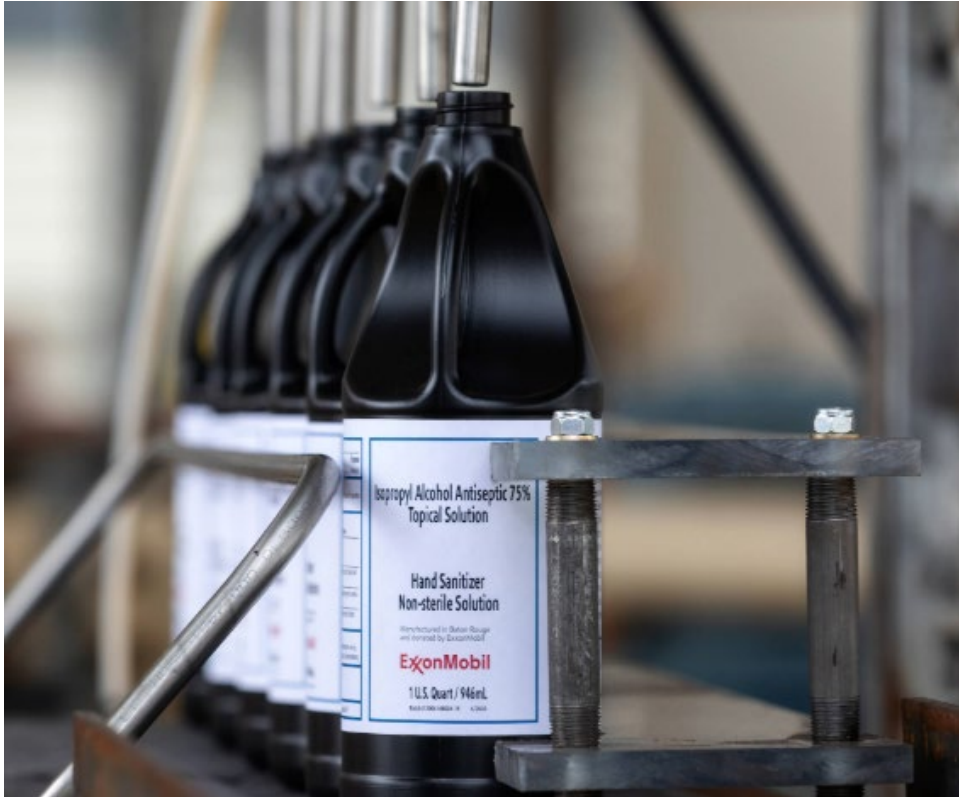
- Are significantly ***more likely*** to have a job that didn't allow them to work from home during the "Hunker Down" order
- Have significantly ***greater*** household size than their counterparts (on average at least 5 members per household).
- Along with people with disabilities, significantly ***less likely*** to engage in ***COVID-19 related risk behaviors*** (not wearing a mask, not physical distancing, etc.)
- Reported significantly ***higher levels of worry*** in terms of ***household finances, losing employment, having self or members of their household being infected by coronavirus, and having enough to eat*** compared to their counterparts

# Additional Challenges



**The challenge of being “the little guy”**

# Additional Challenges

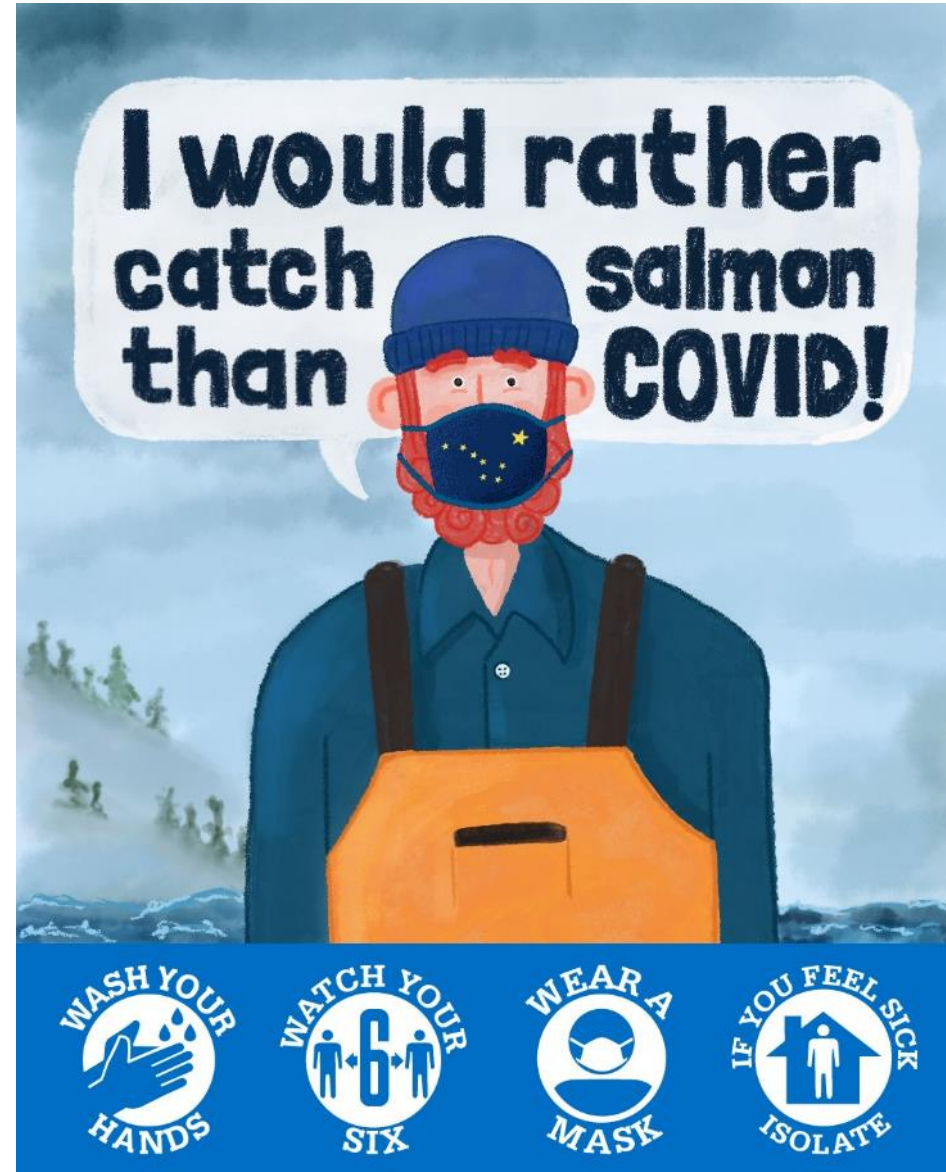


**The challenge of getting what is needed**



# Additional Challenges

**The challenges of industry,  
in particular fisheries and  
fish processing**





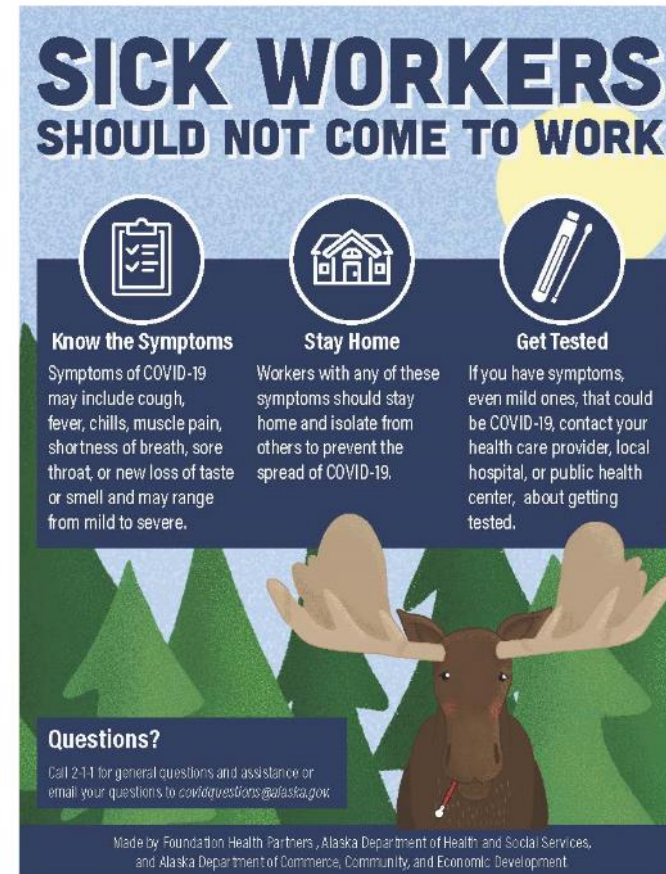
# Responsive Health Communications

Alaska's health communications campaigns, such as *Mask up, Alaska!*, are inclusive of Alaska's diverse population. Language access is also key in communications.



# Responsive Health Communications

Businesses have access to resources like the *COVID Conscious* toolkit to keep employees and customers safe:



# Tribal-State Collaboration

Shared leadership  
between state  
government and  
native and tribal  
communities is  
critical for Alaska



Dr. Zink meets with Mayor Morris Nashoanak of Stebbins

# Tribal-State Collaboration

Shared decision-making, allocation of resources, data-sharing, and communications support Alaska's public health. However, conflicts can arise.



Nalukataq Celebration in Utqiagvik



# Tribal – State – Federal Relationships

**“Guards work 24 hours a day to keep COVID out of some small Alaska Native villages”**

— Sean Maguire, *KTUU News*

**“Alaska’s Remote Villages Are Cutting Themselves Off to Avoid Even ‘One Single Case’ of Coronavirus”**

— *TIME Magazine*

**“Alaska tribes facing food supply restrictions during pandemic seek to hunt out of season”**

— *Anchorage Daily News*

**“In Alaska town, calls to shut down fishing season amid coronavirus fears”**

— *The Washington Post*



# Key Takeaways on Leadership

**In the face of Alaska's ongoing challenges, I strive to:**

- ✓ Be clear with my role
- ✓ Follow data and science
- ✓ Practice humility
- ✓ Exercise honesty
- ✓ Remove the noise
- ✓ Seek partnership



Dr. Zink's wood-stove heated office yurt, behind her family home outside of Anchorage.

# Panel Discussion with Dr. Robert Onders



Ann Zink



Robert Onders

# QUESTIONS?

To ask a question, please click the



icon in the Zoom toolbar to open your Q&A Pod.

# Resources

## **Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC)**

Preparing Tribal Health partners and medical professionals for COVID-19

[anthc.org/covid19/covid19readiness/](https://anthc.org/covid19/covid19readiness/)

## **Alaska Department of Health and Social Services**

Alaska's 1115 Behavioral Health Waiver

[dhss.alaska.gov/dbh/Pages/1115/default.aspx](https://dhss.alaska.gov/dbh/Pages/1115/default.aspx)

## **Alaska Department of Health and Social Services**

COVID Conscious Business Toolkit

[dhss.alaska.gov/dph/epi/id/pages/COVID-19/business.aspx](https://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/epi/id/pages/COVID-19/business.aspx)

**For additional resources, please visit our training page:**

[www.nwcphp.org/training/public-health-leadership-during-crisis](https://www.nwcphp.org/training/public-health-leadership-during-crisis)