

## Prince of Wales Health Network



### ***Prince of Wales Health Network: Collaborating in Healthcare for Prince of Wales Island***

The Prince of Wales Health Network is a vertical Network of healthcare providers serving Prince of Wales Island, located in rural Southeast Alaska. Prince of Wales Island (POW) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest island in the U.S., encompassing over 2500 square miles, with nearly 1000 miles of rugged coastline and 12 communities spread throughout the Island. The Network was formed out of recognition by the healthcare providers serving the Island that improved, facilitated collaboration would be essential to the financial success of all members, enabling them to continue providing quality care to POW's residents.

Network members include Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, the regional IHS provider for Southeast Alaska and 330 funded Community Health Center for the majority of the Island's population (based in Sitka), PeaceHealth, a faith based hospital system based in Washington that operates Ketchikan General Hospital and a primary care clinic on POW, Alaska Island Community Services, a non-profit agency based in Wrangell that provides itinerant primary care and behavioral health services through 330 Community Health Center funding to the island's most remote, northern communities, and the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Craig Public Health Center.

Perhaps the greatest value of the Prince of Wales Health Network is increased and facilitated communication among Network members. Travel in Southeast Alaska, especially to the most rural communities is extremely expensive, time consuming and weather dependent. The Network infrastructure has allowed the Island's providers, many who are located off-island, to come together bi-monthly to discuss the healthcare needs of POW and opportunities for collaboration.

Some of the Network's most successful projects to date include:

- Collective advocacy for increased support to the Island's EMS system, resulting in a new, paid position for an island-wide EMS Coordinator.
- Support for two new regularly occurring visiting specialty clinics to POW – Cardiology and ENT.
- Support for multiple CME opportunities for island healthcare providers.
- Streamlined operations and referrals between the Island's healthcare providers.
- A community education campaign to better inform residents about services available locally on POW.
- Facilitation of a community based, island-wide planning process to improve the behavioral health system on POW.

Although addressing the island's behavioral health system was not a planned activity for the Network when it was formed in 2008, the POW Behavioral Health Planning Project is the greatest success of the Network to date. With grant funding received from the State of Alaska Division of Behavioral Health

following the closure of the Island's primary provider of mental health and substance abuse services, network members saw an opportunity that exemplified why the Network was formed. The POW Health Network has pulled together local stakeholders, service providers, and State representatives to provide needs assessment, capacity building, and strategic planning to strengthen the behavioral health system on POW.

According to Diane Casto, Manager for the State of Alaska Division of Behavioral Health Prevention & Early Intervention, "The work of the POW Health Network is a perfect example of what community action is all about—bringing together the right people, using data to identify the critical issues of the community, engage members toward positive change and keep the focus on the community and its citizens. The POW Health Network has done an amazing job of developing community ownership of the process to assess the behavioral health needs of POW; developing community readiness and capacity to address these issues, and engaging all interested citizens in the hard work of coalition-building and community partnerships. This is the way to make meaningful and lasting change in a community."

The Prince of Wales Health Network is extremely proud of the work it's accomplished in its short, 3 year lifespan. The Network has a new, 3 year work plan in place, which includes incorporation as a 501c3 nonprofit organization, support for increased interagency communication and collaboration, continued improvement of the Island's behavioral health system, development of increased opportunities for our youth, and increased collaboration for maternal and child health services.

For more information, please contact Esther Hammerschlag, Network Director at (907) 826-2410 or [pownetwork@aptalaska.net](mailto:pownetwork@aptalaska.net), or visit the POW Health Network website at [www.princeofwaleshealthnetwork.org](http://www.princeofwaleshealthnetwork.org).