

TO: Skagway Traditional Council

FR: Judean Gordon *JG*
SEARHC Board Representative

RE: SEARHC Board of Director's Annual Work Session Report

The SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC) Board of Directors convened for their annual Work Session on March 11-13, 2024. The objectives of this year's session were to:

- Celebrate the continued growth and success of SEARHC and discuss desired future opportunities
- Build interpersonal connections and foster greater teamwork with the Board of Directors
- Launch the planning cycle for the 2025-2028 SEARHC Strategic Plan

Through these objectives, the Board of Directors aimed to ensure the continued provision of high-quality healthcare services to SEARHC's communities in Southeast Alaska. Chair Strong opened with remarks by expressing her appreciation to all those who had taken the time to travel and contribute to the work of the Board. President Clement expressed his enthusiasm for the discussions to come, especially at this important juncture of SEARHC's evolution with the anticipated opening of the new hospital in Sitka, the upcoming celebration of 50 years of operation in 2025, and the ongoing growth of the Consortium.

Via Healthcare Consultant, Karma Bass touched on the privilege of seeing SEARHC's growth and development over the past decade and the key role that the board's commitment to community and governance excellence has played. Ms. Bass also walked through the process and objectives for the board work session.

Leatha Merculieff, Senior Executive Vice President/Chief Operating Officer, reflected on the 2011 and 2015 strategic plan themes, noting the importance of the concept that "a rising tide floats all boats" and that all of the communities served by SEARHC have benefitted from the growth and development in previous years, whether it has been through the development of new services/facilities within their own community, or improved access through the development of expanded services in neighboring communities. Ms. Merculieff discussed some of the key service developments and areas of growth, expressing particular excitement for the new hospital scheduled to open in March 2025.

Ms. Bass engaged participants in a discussion of the progress and growth they were most proud of. Specifically mentioned were:

- The level of growth across the region
- The commitment to serving all community members, not just Native Alaskans
- The improvement of the community perception of SEARHC
- The growth and achievements of the President and CEO
- The connectedness to place, resiliency, and community-centered approach
- Continued financial strength
- Fantastic leadership staff, and ability to retain them
- Growth of board members and continued focus on good governance
- Commitment to embodying organizational values

Participants also noted the areas that they view as still having growth and development opportunity, noting:

- Improved pharmacy access
- Improved access in more remote communities

- Continuing to reduce leading causes of death
- Addiction issues and suicide as continued problematic areas
- Population health and preventive care
- Expansion of the Alicia Roberts Medical Center (Klawock)
- Coordination of care, specifically for those living with chronic conditions

Martin Benning, Senior Vice President/Chief of Clinic and Hospital Operations presented an overview of specialty care access progress, using a patient story to identify key pain points through the patient journey and the ideal solutions at each point along the way. Mr. Benning noted that about half of specialty appointments stay within SEARHC, which is a significant area of improvement, and further explained that specialty visits had grown from 10,000 to 15,000 visits from 2021-2023, and the proportion of specialty referrals seen by SEARHC providers had grown from 14% to 65% over the same time period. Participants noted that success in the area of specialty access would include:

- Expanding Optometry/Ophthalmology services locally
- Creating control within SEARHC to determine specialty visit necessity, rather than relying on ANMC (Alaska Native Medical Center) or other organizations to determine when patients can be seen
- Reducing wait times for diagnostic tests to reasonable timeframes
- Considerations of public holidays when specialty appointments that require travel are scheduled
- Bringing more specialty in-house to better control specialty scheduling
- Adequate patient housing to support specialty care appointments
- Referral system that enables patients to check on where in the scheduling process they are

Dan Harris, Senior Vice President/Chief Financial Officer, provided an overview of strategic financial management and the relationship between capital investments and cash. Mr. Harris also noted that capital decisions will need to be made alongside each other because SEARHC cannot undertake all of the potential capital projects at once.

On the third day, Mr. Clarke introduced the proposed planning process for the 2025-2028 Strategic Plan, including the alignment of capital and budget planning processes. Participants discussed what a successful strategic planning process would look like, specifically identifying:

- Improved patient satisfaction ratings
- High level of Board of Director engagement in the strategic planning process
- Consistent communication of progress through the process
- Continued focus on increasing access for rural communities
- Quality of facilities in each village motivates providers to want to practice there, or visit
- Retention of Executive Leadership

President Clement addressed participants, noting the 50th anniversary of SEARHC in 2025 and the tremendous pride that he has in how far the organization has come in terms of progress and the direction that SEARHC is heading. He noted that the clinic experience received at SEARHC is as good as anywhere in the world. Also cautioning that getting to the top is easier than staying at the top and if an organization does not continue to progress, it will go backward, so the next phase of SEARHC's development will require the Board and executive leadership team to each play its part in ensuring the organization's continued success.

In closing, the Directors appreciated the invitation to take risks to stay at the top and were thankful for the space created to have such important conversations together.