

HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY IN ALASKA IS BOOMING



In Alaska, the healthcare industry is definitely booming and the boom is expected to grow and increase throughout 2012. There were approximately 31,800 healthcare related jobs during the year of 2010, which was a rise of about 46 percent within the last decade. The growth of healthcare jobs seems to be growing faster than the population of the state and faster than all other sectors. The healthcare employment data was released within a report by the Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association. The report states that the healthcare sector has helped contribute to the economy, with about 7.2 billion during 2010 alone. However, the industry still has its own set of problems as well. Underpayments have cost different Alaska hospitals nearly 410 million during 2010, which was 21 percent of the total cost and is an extremely high rate, the report states. The Alaska State Hospital and Nursing Home Association's president, Karen Perdue, says unpaid hospital costs are often shifted over to other people and create higher bills for the people who can actually afford to pay it. Perdue explains that this is one of the several reasons as to why the cost of hospital care is typically higher than other states. When it comes to healthcare employment, a little over 50 percent of those jobs are within thirteen different hospitals in the Alaska area, along with some nursing homes that operate around the state of Alaska. Perdue says, "It's easy to see why Alaskans often don't think of health care as an industry. But it is, and a very strong one. Hospitals are major employers." She also says, "It's like a fire station, open 24 hours every day of the year. You love to know it's there, and you want it staffed with the most competent people and the best equipment. And, you hope you never have to use it." Healthcare employment helps to stimulate the company, aside from offering employment to those individuals who have gone without work for quite a while. Construction spending for hospitals in Alaska increased and was at about \$305 million during 2011. This helped out the construction sector. And, there were a number of projects in the making in several different areas, including Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Nome. Hospitals have also helped many businesses develop, including medical supply business, hotels, and clinics as well. In fact, in Anchorage, there has been a growth in the amount of clinics and medical offices in the area. The Providence Hospital complex and Alaska Regional Hospital are nearby and are partly the reason for the growth of clinics and offices. However, it is true that in Alaska, healthcare is more expensive than it is in other states. A study, which took place in 2011, showed that hospitals in Alaska charge 38 percent more than six other comparison states.