

Concussion in Alaska: Recovery in Rural Communities

Alaska is the nation's largest and most rural state, with more than 740,000 people living across a wide and often remote landscape.¹ It is a unique state, with approximately 240 remote villages, many of which are only accessible by boat or airplane.² Because of this, recovering from a concussion in a rural area can come with extra challenges.

This guide will provide information on what a concussion is, what symptoms to watch for, and how to take care of yourself during recovery. It also shares tips for staying connected and finding support.

What is a Concussion?

A **concussion** is a type of **traumatic brain injury (TBI)** caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that causes the brain to move rapidly back and forth. This movement can stretch and damage brain cells in a way that disrupts normal brain function.

Concussions are not usually life-threatening, but they can change how a person feels, thinks, or acts.

Common Symptoms

Cognitive: confusion, slowed thinking, trouble focusing

Mood or behavior: anxiety, irritability, sadness, or withdrawal

Physical: headache, dizziness, nausea, blurry vision, sensitivity to light or noise

Sleep: sleeping more or less than usual, trouble falling asleep

Some symptoms show up right away. Others might take hours or even days to appear. It's important to take all concussions seriously and see a healthcare provider.

Concussion Recovery in Rural Alaska

Recovering from a concussion can be especially challenging in rural and remote parts of Alaska, where barriers to care are more common. Long travel distances, harsh weather, limited healthcare infrastructure, and high costs can delay or prevent access to the right support. Even when medical help is available, a lack of providers trained in brain injury can make it harder to get the right support. These challenges disproportionately affect American Indians/Alaska Natives, who have the highest rates of TBI-related hospitalizations and predominantly live in rural regions.³

When in-person care is not immediately available, telehealth and online resources can be a valuable starting point. They can help patients connect with providers, track symptoms, and get guidance without having to travel.

Concussions can also affect mood, sleep, and social interactions.

This may lead to feelings of isolation, particularly in communities that are far apart. Staying connected to family and friends through phone or video calls between in-person visits can support emotional well-being and aid in recovery.

Getting the Support You Need

It's normal to feel overwhelmed after a concussion, especially if symptoms last longer than expected—but you're not alone. Support is available from family, friends, and professionals.

Here are some ways to support recovery and improve mental health:



Stay Connected: Talk openly with people you trust. Sharing how you feel can ease stress and build your support network.



Build Routine: Regular sleep, meals, gentle activity, and quiet time help your brain heal.



Write It Down: Keep track of your symptoms and feelings. Notes can help your healthcare providers understand what you're experiencing.



Ask for Help: It's okay to ask for support. Your care team, family, and friends want to help you through this.

Support & Resources

Resources can be more difficult to access in rural areas, but help is available and there are ways to get the support you need.

Finding Medical and Mental Healthcare

[Concussion Legacy Foundation \(CLF\) HelpLine Alaska](#)
Resource facilitation and peer support: CLFHelpLineAK.org

[Alaska TBI Resource Locator](#)
TBI clinic and provider directory: TBIHelpAK.com

Additional Support & Resources

[Alaska Traumatic and Acquired Brain Injury \(TABI\) Program](#)
Resource facilitation, peer support, and mini grants: (907) 269-3666

[Alaska 211](#)
Statewide helpline and directory connecting Alaskans to essential health and social services: call 211

[National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) Alaska](#)
Mental health support, peer support, resources and education: info@namialaska.org

[Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium](#)
Telehealth services, behavioral health resources, caregiver support education and community wellness programs: 907-563-2662

[Rural Health Information Hub](#)
Funding opportunities, data tools, and guidance on healthcare access, development, and policy issues: 1-800-270-1898

References

1. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/AK/PST045224>
2. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/07/alaska-remote-areas-always-first-counted-decennial-census.html>
3. https://epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/rr2023_02.pdf