

## ***A Community Approach to Address Substance Abuse, including Methamphetamine, in Appalachia***

Substance abuse challenges the rural counties of Appalachian with unprecedented impacts on the human, fiscal and environmental resources of the region. The effects of substance abuse, particularly methamphetamine production and use, continue to eat away at the labor force, the social fabric and family values of the region.

This spring twenty six community teams stepped up to the plate with plans to address these issues in their counties with seed money from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The plans were the outcome of a three-day conference in March 2006 to address issues of substance abuse, including methamphetamine, in Appalachia held in Johnson City, Tennessee. The conference was sponsored by the ARC, the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, the Southeast Public Health Training Center at UNC-Chapel Hill and Appalachian Center for Translational Research Disparities at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and coordinated by ETSU's College of Public and Allied Health and the Office of Rural and Community Health and Community Partnerships.

The conference was a result of a planning workshop for regional substance abuse professionals in August 2005 that defined a need for a community approach to substance abuse involving all affected stakeholder, recognizing the characteristics of the Appalachian experience with substance abuse and disparities in funding and data. Communities were invited to submit applications for scholarships that provided for teams of multiple stakeholders to learn about the issues, to share best practice ideas from their states and to gain skills through workshops in story telling, data collection, grant writing, coalition building and curriculum design. Over 200 individuals from six states participated in the conference which culminated in the formulation of community plans which defined the communities' problems, set goals, strategies and outlined specific action steps.

The teams were made up of law enforcement officers, health care and social service professionals, educators, elected officials, religious and civic leaders. The training emphasized skills which might lead to innovative thinking within agencies and communities to allow communities to "own" their problem and plant the seeds for the solution.

Anne B. Pope, Federal co-chair of the ARC said in her remarks that, "Methamphetamine and other substance abuse is on the rise in Appalachia. It squanders the resources of every segment of our communities. There are many causes and it is not limited by geographic boundaries, economic status or educational attainment, but by working together we now have a plan for the battle."

The communities will divide a total of \$161,300 in grant money, awarded by the ARC and administered by ETSU's College of Public and Allied Health, to implement the plans which will be evaluated over the remainder of the year and which will generate research questions for future study.

For more information about the conference, the planning workshop or the community plans, call 423-439-7658 or email [methconference@etsu.edu](mailto:methconference@etsu.edu).

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