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UNTREATED SUBSTANCE ABUSE RUINS LIVES, BUT TREATMENT SAVES

Every year, untreated substance abuse costs Oklahoma nearly \$7 billion in direct expenditures and lost productivity. But, more importantly, lives and futures are destroyed, said Ben Brown, deputy commissioner for substance abuse services at the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

During September, the department will highlight National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, a campaign that promotes the benefits of substance abuse treatment. This year's theme, "Join the Voices for Recovery: Celebrating Health," focuses national attention on the problem of co-occurring and co-existing disorders—such as depression—that further complicate treatment and recovery. The campaign denotes how important support—from a variety of sources—is to the recovering person.

"Drug and alcohol use is one of the leading causes of family dysfunction and disintegration," Brown said. "As such, its repercussions are great. Because we do not exist in a vacuum, friends of individuals with drug and alcohol problems and the communities in which they live also suffer greatly. Recovery Month is the right time to highlight the benefits of treatment, and to encourage those with substance abuse problems to enter treatment and begin their journeys of recovery."

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In Oklahoma, nearly 130,000 adults need treatment for alcoholism; another 21,000 need treatment for other types of drug use.

“Alcohol is still, by far, our number one drug of choice,” he said. “For every man or woman in Oklahoma person needing treatment for drug abuse, nearly eight people need treatment for alcohol addiction. That statistic ranges from a low of 4.4-to-one in northeast and northwest Oklahoma to 15.4-to-one in southwest Oklahoma.”

Treatment works, he added. Every dollar spent on substance abuse treatment yields up to \$7 in reduced crime-related costs; that figure rises to 12-to-one when health-care costs are included. Workplace productivity increases, interpersonal conflicts are reduced, drug use and crime drop from 40 to 60 percent, and employment prospects increase dramatically.

“Treatment for addiction is as successful as treatment for other chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and asthma,” Brown noted. “Most importantly, treatment helps return the individual to productive functioning in the family, workplace and community.”

Over the past year, the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has added a number of substance abuse programs, including the Norman Adolescent Center, and the Tulsa Women and Children’s Center. The department also collaborates with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services to provide substance abuse treatment to those enrolled in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, restoring lives and families.

“Substance abuse is a family issue,” Brown said. “By offering more family-

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focused treatment, we can reduce damage done to children whose parents abuse drugs or alcohol. Community groups that serve families also are a good resource for parents and children in need of such services. These groups, whether social service organizations or part of the faith community, can play a critical role when it comes to timely intervention and prevention.”

Anybody needing help with a drug or alcohol program can contact the department’s “Reachout” hotline for referral to a community-based treatment center or other resources. For more information, call the hotline at **1-800-522-9054**.

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