

NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
600 East Boulevard Avenue – Department 325, Bismarck ND 58505-0250

Contacts: Pamela Sagness, Prevention Administrator, Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, 701-328-8920, or Heather Steffl, Public Information Officer, 701-328-4933

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 22, 2008

Survey results find perceptions about alcohol and drug use differ from facts on community problems

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services released the results of a statewide community readiness survey that was conducted last April. The results show that key community professionals involved in local law enforcement, health, counseling, and treatment and prevention perceived that alcohol use by youth and adults is a more serious problem than members of the general public who were surveyed.

“We found that too many North Dakotans believe alcohol is a minor to moderate problem among adults and the state’s youth,” said JoAnne Hoesel, the department’s Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division Director.

“We intend to work with key groups of professionals and communities to strengthen relationships and collaboration in order to create more awareness and educate more people about the consequences of alcohol abuse, and how it negatively impacts North Dakota,” Hoesel said.

She said the statewide survey of 14,400 adults and 1,725 key community professionals is an important benchmark about perceptions of alcohol and drug use, as well as current prevention efforts.

Adults surveyed were almost equally split between those who perceived alcohol use by youths as a serious problem (41.3 percent) and those who perceived it as a mild to moderate problem (45.3 percent). Of the key community professionals surveyed, 62.2 percent ranked alcohol use by youth as a serious problem.

Project lead Pamela Sagness said that 5.4 percent of the adults surveyed indicated that alcohol was not a problem in their community.

ADULT USE

Surveyed respondents did not indicate as much concern about alcohol use by adults. Sagness said two thirds of the general population group and about half of the key community professionals responded that alcohol use among adults is a mild to moderate problem in their community.

“Perceptions about alcohol usage as a problem do not seem to match what we know about North Dakota,” she said citing data from a number of agencies.

-MORE-

PAGE 2 - Community Readiness Survey Results: Alcohol Problem

ALCOHOL IMPACT ON SOCIETY

According to 2007 data from the state Department of Transportation data, alcohol or drugs were a contributing factor in 598 car crashes, and 63 North Dakotans died last year because a driver was under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol/drugs/medication was the number one contributing factor to fatal crashes last year.

“In the Department of Human Services, alcohol is the primary drug of choice reported by clients participating in treatment services at our regional human service centers,” Sagness said.

Alcohol is also a leading contributing factor to crime. According to the Attorney General’s North Dakota Crime Summary 2007, 40 percent of all arrests in North Dakota in 2007 were alcohol-related, and one-fourth of all adults arrested in the state in 2007 were arrested for driving under the influence.”

Sagness said, “We also know that alcohol use is a risk factor for domestic violence. The North Dakota Council on Abused Women’s Services/Coalition Against Sexual Assault in ND reported that about one third of domestic violence cases last year involved alcohol use by the offender.”

She said many communities are involved in prevention efforts, and an increased awareness of those efforts will further strengthen local planning and activities.

Minot State University’s Rural Crime and Justice Center conducted the survey for the department in April 2008. The response rate for the general population was 16.8 percent, and for the professionals it was 36.29 percent. It has a margin of error of 10 percent.

The Community Readiness Survey report is available on the Department of Human Services’ Web site at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/prevention.html>.

###