



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **ALCOHOL AND DRUG SCREENINGS REDUCE SUBSTANCE ABUSE** *Model Programs Could Be Implemented in Different Healthcare Settings*

They call it “seizing the teachable moment” and health educators used the 15-minute encounter with patients at local emergency rooms and trauma centers to steer them away from a possible life of addiction.

Today, dozens of local, state and federal officials gathered in San Diego to highlight the success of the federally-funded Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral, and Treatment (SBIRT) projects and discuss how the programs have been and can be applied in various settings, including primary care.

Among the participants were Dr. H. Westley Clark, Director, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Michael Cunningham, Chief Deputy Director, California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs; and Susan Bower, Director, Alcohol and Drug Services, County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA).

“Screenings and brief interventions motivate people who use or abuse alcohol and other drugs to change their behavior,” said Susan Bower, Director of HHSA’s Alcohol and Drug Services. “SBIRT is an innovative strategy to identify people at risk for substance abuse and intervene early to reduce substance abuse, emergency room visits, and decrease future healthcare costs.”

In San Diego County, 15 bilingual health educators conducted 125,000 alcohol and drug screenings at 12 emergency and trauma centers and other healthcare settings over a two-year period.

The voluntary screenings, which took place in collaboration with the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the San Diego State University Research Foundation, produced some impressive results.

About 77 percent (96,250) were brief interviews and education of people with low or no risk for substance abuse. The remaining 23 percent (28,750) were at risk, high or severe risk for alcohol and other drug abuse.

Overall, patients indicated having used alcohol (52%), tobacco (34%), marijuana (14%), and amphetamines (4%)—including meth—in the past three months.

Thanks to the screenings and brief interventions, many of these individuals made big changes in their lives.

Before the screening, 30 percent of patients said they had not used alcohol and 53 percent said they had abstained from drugs in the past 30 days. Six months later, 51 percent said they had not used alcohol and 79 percent indicated abstinence from drugs.

The County was one of two regions in California where the alcohol and drug screenings, funded by the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, took place. The other program was administered by the University of California at Los Angeles.

California spends about \$44 billion annually to address alcohol and other drug abuse. SBIRT projects resulted in reduced healthcare costs, fewer accidents and visits to trauma and emergency rooms.

“Programs like SBIRT save lives and money and can be implemented in various healthcare settings,” concluded Bower.

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