



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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## **IS GRANDMA DOING METH? COUNTY OFFICIALS EXPOSE THE FACES OF METH 1,000 Meth-Related Deaths Recorded in County from 2002- 2006 “Get Off Meth” Brochures Being Distributed Throughout County**

Six people sat on chairs outside Scripps Mercy Hospital in San Diego. Their ages ranged from a young person to someone in his 60s.

“Can you pick the former meth users?” Supervisor Dianne Jacob asked. “Will the former meth users please stand up?” One by one, they all stood.

While a meth user can be anyone—a teen, a parent, college students, men, women—a new face of meth has evolved in the last few years: older adults. The powerful and addictive stimulant is being used by an increasing number of people age 50 and older.

“A meth addiction knows no racial, age, gender, or geographic boundaries. I am sad to report that this deadly drug has invaded one of our most vulnerable communities, older adults and senior citizens. Grandmas and grandpas are now using this toxic drug,” added Jacob, who was joined by Jean M. Shepard, Director, County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA); Michael J. Sise, M.D., F.A.C.S., Medical Director, Trauma Services Scripps Mercy Hospital; and Jeanne McAlister, Chief Executive Officer, McAlister Institute, as well as community residents.

They gathered outside the hospital today to launch the “Get Off Meth” campaign, targeting friends and relatives of meth users and encouraging them to help users seek treatment and declare their independence from meth. The campaign is a collaboration between HHSA, the Meth Strike Force, and Scripps Mercy Hospital.

“Meth destroys freedom. Meth destroys relationships. Meth destroys dreams. Meth destroys everyone. I encourage families to help their loved ones get treatment for their addiction,” continued Jacob, who 10 years ago spearheaded the formation of the County of San Diego Methamphetamine Strike Force to address meth-related problems throughout the region and refer people to treatment.

Meth abuse among older adults and seniors is largely hidden. Society is more likely to envision a young man as a meth user than a grandmother or a grandfather.

In the past five years, 1,000 meth-related deaths occurred in San Diego County. The percentage of meth-related deaths has declined or remained steady for younger age groups. However, the number of meth-related deaths of people over 50 nearly doubled, going up from 22 in 2002 to 41 in 2006. A total of 193 meth-related deaths were recorded during that period for people Last year, 23 percent of the 174 meth-related

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## “Get Off Meth” Campaign—Page 2

deaths recorded in the County were people 50 years or older. Nine were women and 32 were men.

One explanation could be that baby boomers, people born between 1946 and 1964, may have more casual attitudes about drug use and, as they aged, they did not abandon their drug use. Others may have turned to illicit drugs to cope with loneliness and boredom.

“These are very tragic statistics, especially since this is one of our most at-risk populations. It’s extremely important that older adults, seniors, all meth users receive treatment. You can help. We can help,” said Shepard as she held a “Get Off Meth” brochure with information on methamphetamine, the most common signs of meth use and a list of treatment centers and information numbers where people can get the help they need.

Meth dramatically affects the central nervous system and has a high potential for abuse as tolerance develops rapidly, often leading to addiction in a short time. Long-term use can lead to dependence. Meth use causes hallucinations, paranoia, stroke, liver or heart failure, and death.

The English and Spanish brochures will be available at emergency rooms, trauma centers, and many other locations throughout the County. Officials hope the brochures will help diminish the number of deaths and meth-related injuries, as meth use is usually associated with high-risk behavior and serious injury.

Last year, there were 1,160 meth mentions in patients who ended up in local emergency rooms. A study conducted by Dr. Sise and some colleagues between 2003 and 2005 at a Level 1 Trauma Center revealed that meth use went up 61 percent.

“Meth use increased significantly in our patients and was associated with a variety of adverse outcomes and a significant financial burden,” said Dr. Sise, adding that “multidisciplinary community-based prevention efforts must be a priority for trauma centers to help stem the rising tide of meth use.”

Keeping meth users out of emergency rooms and bringing them into treatment is one of the goals of the “Get Off Meth” campaign.

Last year, there were 5,811 treatment admissions at local centers for meth and 7,370 arrests for selling or possessing the drug; another indication that meth continues to have presence in the region.

Clinton Earls, 61, started using meth in his 20s. He soon became addicted and would continue to use the drug for 40 years.

He attempted to kick his addiction on several occasions, but returned to using the drug.

“Meth makes you crazy,” said Earls.

His drug addiction cost him his first wife. He went to prison. His six children objected to him using meth, but he kept on going. About seven months ago, at the urging of his 17 year-old son, the grandfather of three gave treatment one more try.

“I got sick and tired of the revolving door my life had become,” said Earls, adding that he knows people his age who continue to use meth. “My son is my rock. I want to stay straight for him.”

People seeking more information on meth or treatment centers and resources, can call the County of San Diego Meth Hotline at (877) NO2-METH or visit [www.No2meth.org](http://www.No2meth.org).



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