



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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## **COUNTY'S SERIAL INEBRIATE PROGRAM IS "GOLDEN"** ***Program Recognized by San Diego County Taxpayers Association for Reducing Use of Emergency Resources by Chronic Alcoholics***

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's (HHSA) Serial Inebriate Program (SIP) won the Golden Watchdog Award from the San Diego County Taxpayers Association for reducing the use of public resources by chronic alcoholics.

Established in 2000 by two San Diego police officers, the SIP's goals are to decrease the use of police and emergency resources by chronic alcoholics, divert clients to appropriate treatment and medical care, and reduce the amount of uncompensated medical costs.

"Each year, chronic alcoholics cost the community and taxpayers millions of dollars," said Chairwoman Dianne Jacob of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. "This program addresses a critical need in the County by focusing on saving lives and saving taxpayers' money."

In addition to the San Diego Police Department and HHSA's division of Alcohol and Drug Services (ADS), the program's partners include the County's Emergency Medical Services, the San Diego City Attorney, the County Sheriff, Public Defender's Office, Superior Court, Scripps Mercy Hospital, UCSD Medical Center, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Mental Health Systems, Inc., and other community based treatment providers and sober living environments.

SIP research showed that between 2000 and 2003, a total of 308 homeless alcoholics cost a whopping \$17.7 million, of which only 18.6 percent (\$3.3 million) was recovered. The remaining cost of about \$14.4 million was covered by San Diego County taxpayers. After the inception of SIP, a subsequent study revealed a 50 percent reduction in use of emergency resources by this population, saving taxpayers about \$73,000 each month.

The SIP strategy consists of identifying individuals who have been sent to 4-hour sobering services more than four times in a 12-month period. Those individuals are arrested for public intoxication. When a guilty verdict is rendered and mandatory custody time imposed, clients are offered alcohol and drug treatment instead of incarceration. During their treatment, clients also receive case management, housing, and other services to support their treatment, and recovery efforts to help them obtain self-sufficiency.

On average, SIP program participants have spent nearly 16 years living on the street. Their primary drug of choice is alcohol followed by methamphetamine and marijuana. The Serial Inebriate Program can serve about 15 to 20 clients at a time.

The Golden Watchdog Awards honor programs that exemplify good government practices and efficient use of taxpayers' dollars.

"We are thrilled to see that the program has been a success and that our efforts are being recognized," said Susan Bower, ADS Director. "The success of SIP is due to the great collaboration between all the agencies involved."

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