



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ALCOHOL AND DRUG SCREENINGS AT HOSPITALS HELP REDUCE SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Officials from the County of San Diego and the County's [Health and Human Services Agency](#) (HHSA) announced today that voluntary alcohol and drug screenings at local hospitals and healthcare centers are helping reduce substance abuse in the region.

"This is a cutting-edge program that is helping reduce the economic and health impact of substance use in our communities. Today, I am happy to announce some very impressive results," said County Board of Supervisors Vice-Chairwoman Dianne Jacob during a news conference outside of the County Administration Center. She was joined by Nick Macchione, Director of HHSA; Dr. Shane Hamman, Chief Resident, UCSD Department of Emergency Medicine; health educators and other healthcare representatives.

"Alcohol and drug screenings help decrease substance abuse, decrease emergency room visits and decrease the number of days patients spend in hospitals," added Jacob.

In June 2007, HHSA, in collaboration with the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the San Diego State University Research Foundation, implemented a program at Scripps Mercy Hospital and the UCSD Medical Center to reduce the toll of alcohol and drug use on our emergency rooms and trauma centers.

Over the course of its first year, the program expanded to 12 sites across the county. Now, 15 bilingual health educators conduct alcohol and drug screenings through the California Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment Program (CASBIRT)

During the program's first year, health educators conducted 29,000 voluntary screenings of patients 18 years and older.

Of those, more than 27,000 were brief interventions and education of people with low to moderate risk of substance abuse, the program's target population. The rest, about 2,000, were people with high or severe risk of alcohol and drug abuse. They were referred to treatment.

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

Before CASBIRT, 13 percent of patients said they had not used alcohol or drugs in the past 30 days. Six months after CASBIRT started, 39 percent said they had not used alcohol or drugs. That is a whopping 200 percent increase.

The majority of the people screened are not problem drinkers or drug users. However, about 25 percent of the people screened had some risk for substance abuse problems.

CASBIRT intervenes with individuals who are at risk, but appear to be non-dependent. The program targets this population because drinking and drug use behaviors are easier to change before dependency is established.

“Alcohol and other drug consumption have a severe economic and health impact on our hospitals, our medical centers, and our communities,” said Macchione.

California spends about \$44 billion annually to address alcohol and other drug abuse. The benefit of the program is reduced healthcare costs, specifically due to fewer accidents and visits to trauma and emergency rooms.

“Research has shown that programs like CASBIRT save lives and save money,” added Macchione.

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

People with alcohol and other drug problems can access treatment by calling the San Diego Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339.

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