



The Commissioner's Report

September 2006

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

Meth Watch grant announced

The Governor's Criminal Justice Division recently awarded \$180,000 to DSHS for the Meth Watch program, a national effort to curtail criminals' access to common household chemicals and agricultural products that are used to manufacture methamphetamine, and to raise awareness of the harmful effects of methamphetamine use. DSHS will use the grant to expand the program in the north, northeastern, and Panhandle regions of Texas through Prevention Resource Centers in those areas. The PRCs will train community, law enforcement, and business leaders on effective meth awareness and prevention strategies. *For more information, contact Mimi McKay, Division for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, at (512) 206-5804 or e-mail mimi.mckay@dshs.state.tx.us.*

JCAHO surveyors commend staff, operations at Austin State Hospital

Austin State Hospital (ASH) had a Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) survey in mid-July. JCAHO is an independent, not-for-profit organization that sets standards for and evaluates health-care organizations in accordance with nationally recognized guidelines. JCAHO standards measure an organization's level of performance in key functional areas such as patient rights, patient treatment, and infection control. JCAHO also focuses on a hospital's ability to provide safe, high-quality care. To earn and maintain accreditation, an organization must undergo an on-site survey by a JCAHO team at least every three years. State mental health hospitals have maintained accreditation since the 1950s. ASH retains its full accreditation following the July survey, which consisted of visits from several surveyors including a psychiatrist, a psychiatric nurse, a nurse administrator, and a Life Safety Code Engineer who reported that this survey was the first he had done in this calendar year that resulted in no findings. Surveyors complimented the staff for their openness, positive staff-patient interaction, and quality patient care. *For more information, contact Kenny Dudley, State Hospitals Section, at (512) 206-4616 or e-mail kenny.dudley@dshs.state.tx.us.*

DSHS hosts Texas Substance Abuse and Mental Health Institute

This year's Texas Substance Abuse and Mental Health Institute, "Improving the Quality of Care for Texans," sponsored by DSHS and held in Austin from July 31 to August 4, focused on providing Texans with access to integrated public health, mental health, and substance-abuse prevention and treatment services in their communities. With 1,386

registered attendees, this year's gathering was the largest ever. It featured educational presentations on prevention, youth and family, treatment, quality improvement, mental health, non-profit leadership, improving the workforce, and building communities. Keynote speakers were Colleen Cople, community organizer and methamphetamine summit coordinator, and Beverly Watts Davis, senior advisor to the administrator at the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *For more information, contact Dave Wanser, Behavioral and Community Health Services, at (512) 458-7376 or e-mail dave.wanser@dshs.state.tx.us.*

Programs to prevent and curb tobacco use consolidated under single DSHS division

Since its creation in 2004, DSHS has conducted tobacco-use prevention and control activities through several programs in three separate divisions. Each program was designed to reach its target audiences through different mechanisms, and each approach supported significant tobacco prevention and control programming. To more effectively use DSHS tobacco resources, all substance-abuse prevention efforts, including tobacco prevention and control, were consolidated September 1 under the Division for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. By reducing duplication of tobacco activities within DSHS, staff will be able to intensify tobacco-use prevention efforts across a statewide population base with a key strategy to reach as many Texas children as possible through schools, media outlets, community programs, and law enforcement. *For more information, contact Joe Vesowate, Division for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, at (512) 206-5797 or e-mail joe.vesowate@dshs.state.tx.us.*

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES

Changes to birth certificates likely explain 'worrisome' data on prenatal care

On July 12, an article in the *San Antonio Express-News*, "Health officials concerned about prenatal care figures," reported that the percentage of pregnant Bexar County women who received late or no prenatal medical care nearly doubled between 2004 and 2005, a surprising jump that local health officials called "worrisome." This information is based on preliminary data provided by DSHS to local health departments. The article did not state, however, that the change is probably attributable to new information required for the birth record.

In 2005, Texas implemented the *U.S. Certificate of Live Birth, 2003 Revision*, by the Center for Disease Control & Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. The new birth record revised its questions on prenatal care from general ones about when prenatal care began to more specific ones that require exact answers by the respondent as well as input from the provider of care. The new questions led to an increase in missing data, as some respondents did not answer the more difficult questions. This change appears to be a significant factor in explaining the reported prenatal care rates. DSHS expects to see a similar bias in data on tobacco use during pregnancy, beginning with the reports from the 2005 birth certificate, which also includes more specific questions about tobacco use than in previous years. *For more information, contact Brian Castrucci, Family Health Research and Program Development, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 2006, or e-mail brian.castrucci@dshs.state.tx.us.*

WIC vendor lawsuit filed against the U.S. Department of Agriculture

A lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which funds the DSHS Women's, Infants and Children's Supplemental Nutrition Program (WIC), was filed in federal district court in Houston on July 14 by 13 predominantly WIC (PWIC) vendors participating in the Texas WIC program. PWIC vendors are retail grocers who derive more than 50 percent of total food-sales revenue from sales to WIC clients. Collectively, the 13 vendors operate 54 stores across Texas. The lawsuit is related to a DSHS policy that went into effect on June 1 to implement cost-containment requirements established by federal law. DSHS has not been named in the lawsuit, but staff will monitor the case for any direct impact to the agency. *For more information, contact Mike Montgomery, Nutrition Services Section, at (512) 458-7444 or e-mail mike.montgomery@dshs.state.tx.us.*

DSHS participates in Parent to Parent conference on children with special needs

Texas Parent to Parent, an Austin-based contractor offering family support and community services through the DSHS Children with Special Health Care Needs Program, held its second annual conference August 4-5 in Austin. About 200 families registered for it, doubling last year's number. On-site child care allowed more parents of children with special needs to attend a variety of informative sessions, network with other parents, and connect with service and information sources. Families served by the contractor's parent-matching program benefit from the generosity and knowledge of other parents of children with special needs. At the conference, CSHCN staff provided information on medical home issues and transition (such as moving from pediatric to adult health care, and from secondary school to an upper-education setting, work, and/or independent living). The CSHCN program currently contracts with Texas Parent to Parent to provide outreach in Health Service Region 11. *For more information, contact Lesa Walker, Systems Development Group, Purchased Health Services Unit, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 2567, or e-mail lesa.walker@dshs.state.tx.us.*

PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS SERVICES

Staff from health and human services agencies complete preparedness training

In July and August, Texas Forest Service staff conducted Incident Command System training sessions across the state to prepare employees of the state's health and human services agencies for their response role in the event of a disaster. Nearly 1,000 DSHS employees have completed one or more of the course's several trainings, including an introductory online training. Additional trainings are planned for this fiscal year. To ensure a well-coordinated response to public-health emergencies, the HHS agency executives signed a Memorandum of Agreement in June to leverage human and physical resources across the HHS enterprise in support of an effective, statewide disaster response effort. ICS training is only one part of the agreement. A workgroup formed to implement the MOA activities includes representatives from all enterprise agencies and has met weekly since July 11. *For more information, contact Hallie Overton, Community Preparedness Section, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6537, or e-mail hallie.overton@dshs.state.tx.us.*

Application requests additional funds for pandemic-flu preparation

On Aug. 31, DSHS applied to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for additional funds to prepare for a potential influenza pandemic; the application included a proposed budget. About \$15 million is available to Texas upon CDC approval. If received, the funds will be used to assist public health departments in completing plans for health and medical preparedness. Most of the funds will be allocated to DSHS regions and local health departments for local preparedness activities. *For more information, contact Cynthia Morgan, Disease Prevention and Intervention Section, at (512) 458-7607, or e-mail cynthia.morgan@dshs.state.tx.us.*

New cancer report shows tobacco use is top cause of preventable death in Texas

The Texas Cancer Registry recently published a new report, *Tobacco and Cancer in Texas, 1998-2002*, which describes the impact of tobacco-related cancers on Texans and reminds readers that tobacco use is still a significant public health problem. The report finds that tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the United States and Texas. In Texas, tobacco-related cancers accounted for more than 32 percent of all newly diagnosed cancers and 47 percent of all cancer deaths from 1998 to 2002. Significant health disparities also exist in cancer incidence, mortality, and smoking rates, particularly among African-American men and women and Hispanic men in Texas. The report is available in both hard copy and on the Web at <http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/tcr/publications/files/tobacco-2006.pdf>. *For more information, contact Melanie A. Williams, Cancer Epidemiology and Surveillance Branch, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 3633, or e-mail melanie.williams@dshs.state.tx.us.*

OTHER DSHS INITIATIVES

Commissioner presents legislative budget request to Governor's Office, LBB staff

At a public hearing in Austin on August 31, Commissioner Sanchez presented the DSHS Legislative Appropriations Request for Fiscal Years 2008-2009 to staff from the Governor's Office and the Legislative Budget Board. Also in attendance was staff from the Lieutenant Governor's Office, the Senate Finance Committee, and the House Appropriations Committee. One of the chief purposes of the hearing was to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the LAR in an open forum. Commissioner Sanchez noted the difficulty of prioritizing the budget for a department in which half of the General Revenue budget is in the mental health area, with significant additional areas subject to federal requirements such as maintenance of effort, fee funding, and impact on the direct care of Texans with medical needs. He presented the DSHS exceptional items in terms of mental health, behavioral health, public health, and clinical services. After questions and answers on the exceptional items, the panel took public testimony on issues including mental health services and regulatory activities. *For more information, contact Machele Pharr, Chief Financial Officer, at (512) 458-7640 or e-mail machele.pharr@dshs.state.tx.us.*

DSHS receives results of post-payment audit

The state's Comptroller of Public Accounts recently completed a post-payment audit of certain DSHS payroll, purchase, travel, payment card, grant, and revenue transactions from September 1, 2004, through August 31, 2005, to determine whether DSHS complies with state laws and rules concerning expenditures and the processing requirements of the Comptroller's Uniform Statewide Accounting System and Standardized Payroll/Personnel Reporting System. The audit showed that the DSHS error rate for purchase, payment card, and travel transactions ranged from 1.93 percent to 2.01 percent. On August 14, DSHS submitted to the Comptroller's Office a corrective-action plan that addresses the findings detailed in the report. *For more information, contact Kathleen Barnett, Accounting Section, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 6940, or e-mail kathleen.barnett@dshs.state.tx.us.*

New Division for Regional and Local Health Services launched Sept. 1

In August, the DSHS Office of Business and Program Improvement completed a business plan for the new Division for Regional and Local Health Services. The division, which launched on September 1, is intended to strengthen the public health system at the regional and local levels. Its goals include creating a database for local public health authorities and local health leaders and developing curriculum for training on roles of local health authorities, health services regions, and the DSHS central office, including statutory requirements and roles related to disaster preparedness. *For more information, contact Julienne Sugarek, Office of Business and Program Improvement, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 2355, or e-mail julienne.sugarek@dshs.state.tx.us.*

Health officials from three states meet in Austin to discuss border preparedness

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials convened a U.S.-Mexico Border Public Health Preparedness meeting in Austin on August 24, with participation by leading state health officials from Texas, California, and New Mexico. Commissioner Sanchez discussed the already thriving relationship among border-region stakeholders, noting particularly the Border Governors' Conference and the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission, and stressed the importance of building upon the accomplishments of those organizations. Topic areas included surveillance systems and compatibility; human and material resources, including transportation of assets across the border; public information and media relations; and lab capacity for biological and chemical agents. Meeting participants identified high-level priority areas to address in the near future, including multinational vertical and horizontal integration, border-crossing obstacles, information sharing and knowledge management, and federal engagement. *For more information, contact R.J. Dutton, Office of Border Health, at (512) 458-7675 or e-mail rj.dutton@dshs.state.tx.us.*