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TOO FEW ADOLESCENTS GETTING NEEDED DRUG TREATMENT
The facts about adolescent substance abuse and treatment in Hamilton County

CINCINNATI, OHIO -- The demand for services for adolescents with alcohol and other drug problems in Hamilton County is increasing, and the need is not being met with current resources. Adolescents with the additional burden of emotional and behavioral problems are particularly underserved. More residential beds are needed in Hamilton County to treat adolescents addicted to alcohol and other drugs. Currently, the county spends approximately \$300,000 to send children out of county and even out of state to obtain the services they need.

In Hamilton County between July 1999 and June 2000, the Hamilton County Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ADAS) Board reports 1,143 young people, age 18 and younger, received treatment for alcohol and other drug-related problems, primarily marijuana and alcohol abuse. Adolescent admissions by substance type include 11% for alcohol, 68% for marijuana, 3% for other drugs and 18% for family treatment. Some of those admitted to treatment were between the ages of 7 and 11.

The previous year, there were 863 adolescent admissions for treatment, which demonstrates a significant increase in the number of adolescents being admitted to treatment programs in Hamilton County. The last two years show high numbers of adolescents needing treatment for marijuana abuse.

A survey conducted by the Coalition for a Drug-Free Greater Cincinnati this past spring indicates that the use of illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin and inhalants has decreased slightly; however, marijuana and alcohol use are increasing or are unchanged. The average age for a student to first use a substance is 13 years. By the end of the 7th grade, 44% of all students have experimented with at least one drug. Seventy percent of all alcohol consumed by youth is consumed in the home of a youth or friend's house. Seventy percent of parties hosted by youth in our region have alcohol present.

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Adolescents with significant drug/alcohol problems often need more attention than can be provided in traditional outpatient programs. The ADAS Board added a new home-based treatment program this past year. This program gives treatment staff an opportunity to work with the entire family in their home to more effectively address familial, environment, and social support issues which impact adolescent drug/alcohol use. More such programs are greatly needed.

The good news is that research has found that substance abuse treatment is effective for adolescents. A national study of community-based treatment programs for adolescents found that reported weekly marijuana use dropped by more than half in the year following treatment. Treatment for adolescent substance abuse can also reduce heavy drinking and criminal behavior, and improve psychological adjustment and school performance.

A taxpayers' investment in substance abuse treatment yields a greater than 2-to-1 return due to the post-treatment reduction in costs associated with medical care and crimes related to alcohol and drugs. Despite the benefits of treatment, a significant gap exists nationally between the number of adolescents who need substance abuse treatment and those who receive it. A study in Minnesota concluded that only one-fourth of youth age 14 to 17 who needed treatment were able to receive it. In Hamilton County, that number is estimated at only 10 percent.

"People who interact with adolescents in the home and community need to be alert to changes in behavior and appearance that may signal drug abuse. By recognizing the potential signs and symptoms of drug use, it is possible to get help for a teenager in need of intervention or treatment," said Sherry Knapp, chief executive officer of the Hamilton County ADAS Board. "Getting help for teens with substance abuse problems early in life can ensure safe, healthy and successful futures," she added.

The Hamilton County ADAS Board has established adolescent treatment as a top priority. Specifically, the most urgent need is for intensive case management services focusing on adolescents who abuse alcohol/drugs and also have emotional, behavioral and family problems, which makes it more difficult for them to participate and succeed in treatment. Based on adolescent drug survey results and requests from the field, adolescent prevention and treatment services are also a statewide priority. The Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services has put adolescent services at the top of the list of priority initiatives for the coming budget. ###

