

Substance abuse a problem in Neb.

Substance abuse is a major contributor to deaths and hospitalizations in Nebraska, according to a report released by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The report also found that substance abuse creates a strain on the criminal justice system in the state.

“Substance abuse—the use of tobacco, illicit drugs and misuse of alcohol—causes problems in Nebraska,” said Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. “Like every state and community in the country, we are struggling with the consequences. Substance abuse represents a threat to public safety and the well-being of individuals and their families.”

In 2004, there were an estimated 392 alcohol-related deaths, an estimated 2,115 smoking-related deaths, and 61 deaths in which drugs were listed as the primary cause of death.

In 2003, there were 4,948 alcohol-attributable hospitalizations, an estimated 8,517 smoking-related hospitalizations, and 2,887 drug-attributable hospitalizations.

“Deaths and hospitalizations can be reduced if substance abuse is addressed,” Dr. Schaefer said.

High school students in Nebraska were 1.7 times more likely than students nationally to report driving after drinking in the past month in 2005 (17.3 percent vs. 9.9 percent); while adults were 1.7 times more likely than adults nationally to report past month alcohol-impaired driving (4.2 percent vs. 2.5 percent) in 2006.

In 2006, more than one-third of all fatal motor vehicle crashes in Nebraska involved alcohol, killing 86 individuals in 77 alcohol-involved fatal crashes.

“Alcohol-impaired driving is particularly high here and a common factor in fatal motor vehicle crashes. It places a tremendous strain on the criminal justice system,” Dr. Schaefer said.

In 2006, there were 13,409 arrests for driving under the influence, 12,714 arrests for non-DUI alcohol-related crime, and 10,502 arrests for possession or sales/manufacturing of illicit drugs in Nebraska. These were the top three offenses in 2006 and together accounted for two in every five arrests.

Of all adults sentenced to probation in Nebraska in 2006, more than half (55 percent) were sentenced for DUI and about 1 out of every 17 (6 percent) were sentenced for a drug-related offense.

“Alcohol was the primary drug of choice for people admitted for substance abuse treatment,” said Scot Adams, Ph.D., Director of the DHHS Division of Behavioral Health. “Abuse of alcohol is the basis for a lot of problems and may lead to abuse of other substances.”

In 2006, 7 out of every 10 substance abuse admissions (71 percent) were because of alcohol, followed by methamphetamine (12.5 percent), marijuana (9 percent) and cocaine (5 percent).

Alcohol is the most commonly used substance in Nebraska, with more than half of all persons age 12 and older (56 percent), an estimated 800,000

residents, reporting alcohol consumption in the past month during the combined years of 2004 and 2005.

Other findings in the report:

- Binge drinking (defined as having five or more alcoholic drinks during one occasion) was higher among Nebraska residents than among residents nationally. During 2004-2005 combined, more than a quarter of persons age 12 and older reported past-month binge drinking (27.2 percent vs. 22.7 percent nationally).
- Cigarette smoking was similar to national usage. One-fourth (24.5 percent) reported smoking in the past month (vs. 24.9 percent nationally).
- Approximately one out of 15 reported using an illicit drug during the past month (6.5 percent) compared to one out of 12 persons nationally (8 percent).

The report is a product of the Nebraska Strategic Framework State Incentive Grant, a five-year grant given to the Department of Health and Human Services from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

A group called the Nebraska Partners in Prevention has developed a strategic plan to address substance abuse in the state.

Based on this data, the Partners in Prevention have chosen three alcohol-specific prevention priorities to be addressed at the community level through a competitive grant application process. The priorities include:

- Prevent alcohol use among those 17 and younger;
- Reduce binge drinking among 18-25-year-olds;
- Reduce alcohol-impaired driving across all age groups.

For more information, go to

www.dhhs.ne.gov/srd/SubstanceAbuseReport07.pdf