

Karleen Jackson

Commissioner

P.O. Box 110601

Juneau, AK 99011-0601

www.hss.state.ak.us



Sherry Hill

Assistant Commissioner

for Public Affairs

907.465.1618

cell: 907.321.2838

sherry.hill@alaska.gov

Press Release

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Contact: Sarana Schell, (907) 269-8041, Cell (907) 240-7462
Cathy Stadem, (907) 269-3495, Cell (907) 529-1520

Rural primary care providers get new mental health telemedicine resource

State and Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium partner on monthly education sessions

(Anchorage, AK) — Front-line care providers in rural Alaska have a new way to help meet their patients' mental health needs. Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) and Alaska Federal Health Care Access Network now offer a free monthly behavioral health videoconference to Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium providers.

"Mid-level primary health-care providers are the first contact for people who need behavioral health treatment," said API Chief Executive Officer Ron Adler, of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. "These videoconference lectures and consultations let providers around the state ask behavioral health specialists about medication and treatment options."

Alaskans' need for mental health services, especially in remote communities, is clear. The suicide rate for rural Alaska children is nine times the national average. The Alaska Native adult death rate from suicide is four times greater than the national average; from alcohol, seven times greater.

"This collaboration brings a substantial benefit to our clinical partners, who are confronted with a range of pressing mental health needs," said Kathleen Graves, director of behavioral health for Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. ANTHC is the managing partner of the Alaska Federal Health Care Access Network.

The continuing education sessions, which began in late February, are available to all 34 health organizations in ANTHC. The sessions also provide professional development opportunities, building providers' confidence and proficiency with videoconferencing equipment.

As providers build their technical skills, they are more likely to be creative and apply videoconferencing to a wider range of health-care applications, from nutritional consultations to pre-surgery instructions.

The new sessions are part of a broad range of telehealth services offered by API's Telebehavioral Outpatient Mental Health Clinic. API psychiatrists and other licensed mental health professionals, psychologists and social workers routinely use videoconferencing to treat clients around the state as part of the state's Telebehavioral Healthcare Services Initiative.

(more)

Alaska Psychiatric Institute's Alaska Recovery Center provides therapeutic services that help individuals achieve a personal level of satisfaction and success in their recovery. API works in partnership with individuals, their families and community network, and providers.

The Alaska Federal Health Care Access Network (AFHCAN) began in 1998 as an Alaska Federal Health Care Partnership project to improve health care to federal beneficiaries in Alaska using telemedicine technology. AFHCAN has expanded to more than 300 sites in Alaska and elsewhere in the United States, as well as several international locations, including Panama, Greenland and Saudi Arabia.

The AFHCAN system includes a Web-based client interface as well as videoconferencing solutions and support.

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