



Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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State awards \$1.02 million to build regional suicide prevention teams

Three regions receive three-year grants

(Anchorage, AK) — The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services awarded three \$339,000 regional grants earlier this month as part of the Alaska Youth Suicide Prevention Project. The Division of Behavioral Health, Prevention and Early Intervention Services section is coordinating the awards.

The Alaska Youth Suicide Prevention Project carries the message to communities that youth suicide is preventable, and targets high-risk youth for prevention, intervention and follow-up.

Awards of \$113,000 per year for three years went to three agencies serving corresponding regions:

- SEARHC: communities in Southeast Alaska
- The village of Akiachak, in partnership with Kwethluk, Tuluksak and Akiak: the Bethel region
- Fairbanks Counseling and Adoption: Fairbanks and surrounding communities

The awards are to develop regional suicide prevention teams that include a variety of community groups as well as youth, parents and other individuals.

The teams will be responsible for building a strategic plan tailored to their region that includes steps: 1) to prevent youth suicide by promoting positive activities, 2) to intervene by identifying youth at risk and referring them to help, and 3) to follow up in the wake of a suicide attempt.

Plans are required to include Gatekeeper training, a “first responder” training that teaches paraprofessionals and community members how to identify risk factors and warning signs associated with suicide and how to connect youth at risk to community supports and professional resources. Other components of the plan are decided by each region.

The state grants, administrative support, technical assistance, a university campus pilot project and overall project evaluation are funded through a \$1.5 million Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act grant that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) gave Alaska in October 2008.

In July 2009, Alaska also received a \$10.7 million SAMHSA Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant to develop similar regional teams to promote remote communities’ behavioral health — a term that includes both mental health and substance abuse prevention.

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