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Press Release

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Alaska receives \$11.5 million for rural substance abuse prevention

Five-year grant will build regional teams around the state

(Anchorage, AK) — The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) awarded a five-year, \$11.5 million grant to Alaska's Division of Behavioral Health, Department of Health and Social Services. The grant targets rural Alaska's ability to promote communities' behavioral health – a term that includes both mental health and substance abuse prevention.

The Behavioral Health Division and its partners will develop more than a dozen regional training and support teams to serve the 200-plus villages and communities in remote Alaska.

“There are deeply rooted challenges but more deeply rooted strengths in rural Alaska,” said Behavioral Health Director Melissa Witzler Stone. “This grant gives our smallest communities an unprecedented opportunity to build on their rich culture and other strengths, in combination with research we have on strategies that have been successful in Alaska.”

The grant, through SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant program, is very structured, said L. Diane Casto, manager of Prevention and Early Intervention Services for Behavioral Health.

The first year will be spent analyzing data and resources to develop a statewide rural substance abuse prevention plan; once completed, grant funds will then be available to communities.

The plan must track results over time, and will bring together the diverse stakeholders in prevention issues.

“That's a philosophy we wholeheartedly support,” said Casto. Her team will work with Tribal and health organizations, other state agencies, schools, private non-profits, the University of Alaska, and others.

For details on SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant program, see: <http://prevention.samhsa.gov/grants/sig.aspx>

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