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## Press Release

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### **Federal grant expands access to mental health care for Alaskans**

*Primary care providers in remote areas have easier access to state hospital's telemedicine*

(Anchorage, AK) — Front-line care providers in rural Alaska can now tap into remote-access mental health care from Alaska Psychiatric Institute (API) on an as-needed basis, without having to enter into a long-term formal agreement.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration gave API a \$221,000 grant to open a "walk-in"-type open-access clinic, where services are accessible via videoconference. API is part of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health.

The grant aims to deliver this new à la carte service to more than 200 small health care sites around Alaska. They have the equipment to connect to API, but haven't had enough patient demand to justify the cost of a long-term contract, such as those that API maintains with regional hub communities.

"Nurse practitioners, physician's assistants and other frontline primary health-care providers are the first contact for people who need behavioral health treatment," API Chief Executive Officer Ron Adler said. "By providing behavioral health care before patients' needs become so dire that they must come to urban centers, we are providing better care more quickly and without the trauma and cost of having to leave home for treatment."

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

The new remote-access clinic at API is now open, staffed by a mental health clinician and an adult psychiatrist; a teen and child psychiatrist will be available one day each month beginning in April.

Primary care providers in remote communities can request a same-day videoconference appointment for their patients. Also, providers can consult on patient cases with the behavioral health professionals, who treat both mental health and substance use issues.

API requested the grant to pay salaries for the three clinicians and an administrator at the open-access clinic for 10 months, anticipating that the clinic can become financially self-sustaining.

For details, see [www.hss.state.ak.us/dbh/api/remote\\_access.htm](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dbh/api/remote_access.htm).

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