



April 25, 2002
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STUDENTS, POLICYMAKERS TO DISCUSS SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Substance Abuse Summit May 13-14 to Feature Innovative Partnerships

With a national report showing that half a million college students are injured in alcohol-related accidents each year, strengthening ties with institutions of higher learning is a top goal of a conference that links professional and community partners throughout San Diego County.

Substance Abuse Summit VII, to be held May 13 and 14 at the Town and Country Hotel and Convention Center, also will seek to improve the community's use of prevention research and other resources available through colleges and universities. A 1998 County study showed substance abuse problems cost county taxpayers \$1.8 billion, and recent studies by the Harvard School of Public Health show that 44 percent of college students nationwide are binge drinkers.

More than 800 people, including 200 high school students, are scheduled to participate in the event, which will feature 32 workshops and many informational exhibits. The conference will begin with an interactive community forum, where youth and adult leaders will discuss the roles of youth, parents, community systems and political leaders in efforts to reduce the risk of alcohol, tobacco and other drug problems.

The summit is the culmination of a year-long effort by 12 community work groups, each representing diverse community interests, including health care, education, justice, sports, parents and youth — as well as this year's new partner, higher education.

"Substance abuse takes a heavy toll in San Diego County, on and off college campuses," said Ron Roberts, Chairman of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, who will speak at the event. "By building partnerships among many affected communities, the Substance Abuse Summit can play a critical role in reducing and preventing drug and alcohol problems."

"Colleges can be high-risk zones for underage and binge drinking, sexual assault, vandalism and related threats," Roberts said. "But with resources applied to prevention, research, treatment and law enforcement, campuses and communities can work together to make our county and its colleges safer."

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