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## **Meth abuse causes more emergency room visits than all other drugs**

### *Need for meth treatment programs growing dramatically*

Washington, D.C. – Two new surveys released today by the National Association of Counties (NACo) show that methamphetamine abuse continues to have a devastating effect on America’s communities.

One survey, “The Effect of Meth Abuse on Hospital Emergency Rooms,” revealed that there are more meth-related emergency visits than for any other drug and the number of these visits has increased substantially over the last five years. The second survey, “The Challenge of Treating Meth Abuse,” showed that the need for treatment programs for meth addiction is growing dramatically and lack of funding is an obstacle in meeting this demand.

“There is no question that meth abuse is having a devastating effect on America’s communities,” said Bill Hansell, President of NACo and Commissioner in Umatilla County, Ore. “Some states have enacted legislation that has been effective in reducing the number of local labs that produce meth. But officials in two of those states have said that the number of users has not been reduced. We still have a fight on our hands. The vast majority of meth being used today is being imported into our country. We have to find a way to treat those people that have become addicted and prevent others from becoming addicted.”

Both surveys were conducted in late 2005. The results of the emergency room survey are based on 200 responses from hospital emergency room officials in 39 states. Most of the hospitals participating in the survey are either county owned or operated. The second survey asked 200 county behavioral health officials in 26 states about drug treatment programs and how they have been affected by the meth epidemic.

Hansell said the surveys illustrate the difficult problem county governments are facing financially to provide the services that are needed. Forty-seven percent of the hospitals say that methamphetamine is the top illicit drug involved in presentations at their hospitals. The drug next highest on the list is marijuana at 16 percent.

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Seventy-three percent of the hospital officials in the survey reported that emergency room presentations involving meth have increased over the last five years, and 68 percent reported continuing increases during the last three years.

The problems are compounded because the patients rarely have health insurance. Eighty-three percent of the emergency room officials reported that people requiring treatment for a meth-related emergency are often uninsured. Hospital costs are rising as a result. Fifty-six percent of the hospitals reported that costs have increased because of the growing use of meth. County governments and their residents have to pay the rising costs of this uncompensated care.

In the second survey, 69 percent of the responding officials reported an increase in the need for treatment programs in their counties because of the growing use of meth. However, 63 percent of the officials reported that they do not have sufficient capacity in their county programs to treat meth addicts and 57 percent say the reason is lack of funding.

Another factor affecting treatment programs is that treatment for meth addiction is different from other drugs. Fifty-four percent of the officials reported that the success rate is different and 44 percent said that the length of time in the program is longer for meth addicts. Meth users seeking treatment require special protocols and longer treatment periods than users of other drugs.

Hansell said NACo wants Congress to pass and President Bush to sign comprehensive legislation that will address all aspects of the meth abuse problem. This will include legislation on precursors and increased funding for treatment.

“The President is a strong supporter of substance abuse treatment programs,” Hansell said. “We hope that he will recognize the need for more funding for treatment.”

This is the second set of surveys that NACo has released on meth abuse. In July 2005, NACo released the results of two surveys it conducted on the impact of meth. The surveys reported responses from county sheriffs and police departments and from child welfare officials. The survey of 500 sheriffs and police departments showed that meth abuse is the top drug problem facing counties in America.

In an alarming number of meth arrests, there is a child living in the home. Often, these children suffer from neglect and abuse. Forty percent of the counties where child welfare activities are the responsibility of the county reported that out of home child placements have increased because of meth, according to the second survey released in July.

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*NACo is a full-service organization that provides legislative, research, technical and public affairs assistance to county governments. Created in 1935, NACo continues to ensure that the nation's 3,066 counties are heard and understood in the White House and Congress. [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org)*