



700 N. 10th Street, Suite 200
Sacramento, Calif. 95814

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Contact: Bill Bradley
(916) 213-5230 cell

PROP. 63 MENTAL HEALTH FUNDS HELP KERN COUNTY'S AT RISK POPULAION

(Bakersfield, CA) – Today, state and local leaders held a press conference in Bakersfield to highlight its newly implemented Telepsychiatry program, an innovative new program designed to provide Kern County residents, regardless of geographic location, with mental health services via video conferencing.

“Kern is a geographically vast county with many outlying cities and towns,” said Darlene Prettyman, Commissioner, Mental Health Services Act Oversight and Accountability Commission. “Providing service to residents with mental health issues in these outlying areas has been challenging at best. However, through the Telepsychiatry program we now have the capability to reach underserved or unserved residents with mental health needs in remote locations.”

Today’s event was the last of four statewide events promoting ground breaking new programs that are being funded by Prop. 63, the Mental Health Services Act. Prop. 63 was approved by voters in 2004 to expand mental health services statewide through a 1% tax on personal income above \$1 million. More than \$1.7 billion has been collected to date and is in the process of being distributed statewide.

To date, Kern County has received more than \$6.1 million in initial MHSA allocations. With that money, fourteen new programs have been established serving people who previously were unserved or underserved. In its first year, Kern County Community Services and Supports (CSS) programs served 13,184 individuals through direct services and system development programs. As a component of the CSS Outreach and Education program, Kern County Mental Health activities during the month of May resulted in contacts with over 2,500 individuals. The Outreach and Education program’s public internet tool “Network of Care” consistently experiences heavy traffic with many first-time contacts monthly. For example, in the month of June, 5,300 pages of information were viewed with 616 first-time viewer hits.

Statewide, 120,000 people came together in local communities to identify priorities for serving people with mental illness. Counties submitted plans to the California Department of Mental Health and funding for approved programs began in January 2006. “During our planning process, approximately 4000 residents expressed ideas for improving and enhancing mental health services in Kern County,” said Diane Koditek, Director of the Kern County Department of Mental Health. “The fourteen programs that make up Kern’s Mental Health Services Act Community Services and Supports Plan provide new resources to consumers and family members and the opportunity to better support the recovery of individuals who’ve struggled with few or no services.”

The Telepsychiatry Program serves a critical need for Kern County residents with mental disorders by providing clinical consultation, evaluations and assessment services via video conferencing. The program has Telepsychiatry links established in Taft, Wasco, Bakersfield, California City, Rosamond, Tehachapi, Lake Isabella, Kernville, Ridgecrest, Lamont, Frazier Park and Delano. By the end of 2007, twenty six links will be available to regions throughout Kern County. Additionally, the Telepsychiatry program is capable of being used for other video conferencing needs, such as grievance hearings and for remote attendance at Behavioral Health Board meetings among others.