

# NEWS RELEASE



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## NCADD-NJ Budget Testimony Urges Treatment Outlay

TRENTON ... (March 16, 2005) – The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey today contributed testimony on the state’s Budget urging an investment in expanding treatment for alcohol and drug addiction, an issue that received considerable attention in last fall’s debate over needle exchange. In laying out its case, the council cited state statistics showing that half the adults (71,000) and two-thirds of teenagers (14,000) seeking treatment for a problem with alcohol or drugs cannot access the care they need because of New Jersey’s limited capacity.

“As the Legislature begins to review Acting Governor Dick Codey’s budget proposal,” said John Hulick, director of Public Affairs and Policy for NCADD-NJ, “it is worth bearing in mind that in the recent debate over needle exchange, just one point bridged the polarizing divide between the issue’s supporters and its detractors: the need for more addiction treatment. Passionate supporters of needle exchange along with those dead set against it found common cause in appealing for expanding care for people with an addiction to drugs or alcohol.”

NCADD-NJ’s testimony noted that in the aftermath of the needle exchange discussions, several lawmakers introduced bills to broaden treatment. Among these measures are Senator Wayne Bryant’s bill allocating \$15 million more in treatment funding and Senator Barbara Buono and Senator Nicholas Asselta’s proposal for an increase in the percentage of the revenue raised through alcohol taxes that is dedicated to counties for treatment, an allocation known as the Alcohol Education, Rehabilitation, and Enforcement Fund (AEREF).

“If there is a story to be told that demonstrates the inattention to expanding addiction treatment in New

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Jersey, it is the story of the AEREF,” NCADD-NJ’s Hulick said. He noted that the annual allocation has remained stagnant at \$11 million since 1992, reflecting neither the increased alcohol excise tax revenues over that period nor making any adjustment for inflation. In the 2004 calendar year alone, the jump in alcohol tax revenues over the previous year was \$3.5 million. NCADD-NJ, through the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University, polled state residents in recent years and found that two in three New Jerseyans support an increase in the alcohol tax, provided a portion of the added tax is dedicated to addressing the treatment shortfall.

The testimony further demonstrates that funding addiction treatment is a sound investment for New Jersey, as alcohol and drug misuse lead to countless injuries and illnesses that affect the state’s health care costs. Of all the patients admitted to general hospitals, 40 percent are there due to complications arising from addiction; and people with alcohol or drug problems average four times as many days in the hospital as non-users.

The testimony’s economic argument for expanding treatment becomes more convincing in view of findings that those addicted to alcohol or drugs generally incur health care costs that are at least 100 percent higher than those of non-addicted individuals. After being treated for an addiction, one’s health care costs decline by 22 to 55 percent. The testimony adds that the scarcity of treatment for alcohol and drug addiction has resulted in New Jerseyans experiencing countless preventable injuries, diseases and deaths, along with their associated costs. The document concludes that an increased expenditure for treatment in this budget will signal the state is prepared to make an investment that will allow it to see the full potential of its resources, human and economic.

*NCADD-NJ has dedicated itself for more than 20 years to educating New Jersey’s citizens about alcohol and drug use issues, to advocating on state policies concerning individuals affected by addiction, and to reducing the stigma that frustrates a public health approach to the disease of addiction.*

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