

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE-NEW JERSEY

1675 Whitehorse-Mercerville Road, Suite 205, Hamilton, NJ 08619

CONTACT: John L. Hulick, MS, CPS
609/689-0599 x153
jhulick@ncaddnj.org

NCADD-NJ Announces Results of Candidates' Survey

Eighty percent of New Jersey major party candidates responding to a questionnaire on addiction treatment and prevention issues believes that alcohol and drug addiction is a preventable, treatable chronic disease that is as consistently diagnosable as illnesses such as diabetes, asthma and hypertension. In addition, 88 percent of those responding said the state and nation should more heavily emphasize a public health approach to alcohol and drug addiction, and target demand reduction activities such as treatment and prevention.

Earlier this year, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in Plainsboro Twp. declared addiction to be the nation's number one public health problem.

The survey was prepared by the public affairs unit of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence-New Jersey and sent to all New Jersey gubernatorial candidates and those running for the state Senate and Assembly.

The survey is one tool NCADD-New Jersey is using to inform the public and promote awareness of key issues and candidate positions related to the treatment and prevention of alcoholism and drug diseases. The agency also published Decision 2001: At a Crossroad on Addiction Policy, a general election guide that is available on NCADD-New Jersey's Web site, along with other election information.

NCADD-New Jersey supports the recovery of alcoholics and addicted people and their families, and works to reduce the societal stigma surrounding alcoholism and drug addiction. It formulates public policy initiatives and advocates for legislation and regulations that support a public health approach to alcohol and drug diseases, which are both preventable and treatable.

The survey is not designed to commit candidates to specific positions or to vote later in a certain way. It simply indicates a candidate's general inclinations on issues related to addiction treatment and prevention.

The survey also found:

n When questioned about preventing and reducing youth alcohol and drug use, 89

percent favored developing and implementing a counter-marketing campaign that parallels current national anti-drug media campaign to delay the first use of alcohol and drugs, and setting aside tobacco settlement money to expand prevention efforts such as county-based prevention resource centers and the Municipal Alliances for a Drug-Free New Jersey.

- n When asked about the public capacity for alcohol and drug addiction treatment, 87 percent of respondents said tobacco settlement funds should be used to expand treatment capacity; 83 percent supported the enactment of a treatment on demand initiative to offer all those seeking publicly-funded substance abuse treatment immediate entry into a program; 76 percent favored appropriating additional alcoholic beverage taxes to expand treatment capacity (currently, the state uses \$8.25 million of the \$82 million collected for treatment); and 74 supported the dedication of drug forfeiture funds to expand treatment capacity.

- n When questioned about issues concerning private health insurance for treating alcohol and drug diseases, 85 percent of respondents supported parity for alcohol and drug treatment so that when an insurance plan includes such coverage in a contract, the contract must include both inpatient and outpatient treatment at the same level as for medical services. Seventy-two percent approved of establishing an addiction treatment services ombudsman to assist consumers of addiction treatment services in navigating the appeals processes of both private and state government plans. Seventy percent supported requiring health insurance providers to use a neutral assessment instrument such as the Addiction Severity Index or the American Society of Addiction Medicine patient placement criteria for addiction treatment determinations.

- n When asked about criminal justice practices and treating the addicted offender, 83 percent said that treatment of criminal offenders should be a key part of the entire criminal justice systems that encompasses incarceration, probation and parole. Seventy-four percent supported state support for municipally-based drug courts to intervene earlier in an offender's criminal behavior and drug use, and allowing first- and second-time nonviolent, simple drug possession offenders a change to receive substance abuse treatment instead of incarceration. Seventy percent favored expanding Superior Court drug courts to all 21 counties in the state.

- n When questioned about systemic issues concerning alcohol and drug treatment, 96 percent of respondents supported the establishment of a recruitment/retention program for counselors that would ensure proper and accessible training as well as a competitive wage; 89 percent favored setting Medicaid and other public reimbursement rates for addiction treatment to accurately reflect what it costs providers to treat an addicted client; and 57 percent wanted the establishment of a capital construction fund to expand treatment bed capacity.

Detailed survey answers from each candidate who responded, as well as the survey itself, are available on NCADD-New Jersey's Web site, www.ncaddnj.org.