

Tundra Times



Inupiat People's Heritage
Uk Kik Nook Interview and Reporting

Dee Nook Henech-Chat Land Speaks
Ungavik Tinektang the Aitut Speak

Yupik Kankasat the Way Yup'ik Talk

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Guest editorial

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Today it is common knowledge that addictions, whether they be to substances, relationships or processes — such as work, overeating or gambling — are harmful to individuals and society as a whole.

In particular, we are well aware of the devastation associated with substance abuse. Each year, thousands of families, careers and lives are destroyed by the affects of alcohol and other drug abuse. Nationally, one out of every three adults report alcohol has brought trouble to their family.

In Alaska, alcohol is a significant factor in up to 90 percent of child abuse cases. Substance abuse and related problems such as suicide, violent crime, and fatal accidents continue to be the most serious health and social problems facing Alaskans today. Obviously, the economic impact is significant when we consider injuries, accidents, deaths and lost productivity. In 1984, the costs to Alaska for alcohol and other drug abuse were estimated to be almost \$258 million.

There has been much discussion in the field of addiction studies as to the most effective methods of dealing with this problem. Services providing treatment for substance abuse have come a long way in the last 10 years and enforcement has been significantly beefed up in the area of illegal drugs.

But the problem persists. Intervention techniques are only partially effective. They are reactive in nature and serve only to chip away at an already overwhelming problem.

It is time to take action to *prevent* the problems of substance abuse. In an area of scarce resources, prevention becomes especially important. It is estimated that for every \$1 invested in prevention programs, \$4 are saved the following year alone by eliminating the services associated with substance abuse. Prevention is cost effective and it works.

But what is prevention and what does it entail? Prevention is a "process" intended to promote and protect health and reduce or eliminate the need for remedial treatment of the physical, social and emotional problems associated with the consumption of chemical substances. It is a positive process that promotes human growth and development as well as healthy communities. Prevention is holistic in nature as it encompasses the factors of inheritance, behavior and environment.

Prevention, then, focuses not only on the individual, but on the family, schools, churches, workplaces, media and various groups within a community. All these areas must interact to promote health and support positive change.

The use of drugs, both legal and illegal, is all too commonplace in our society. Public policy can formulate, communicate and enforce the appropriate or inappropriate use of drugs in our society by providing guidelines that govern drug use behavior.