



NCSL Provides State Legislators with Information About Substance Abuse Policy

Providing technical assistance to state legislators on the issue of substance abuse

SUMMARY

Between 2002 and 2007, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported project staff at the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) (NCSL) to produce and disseminate information to state legislators, their staffs and the broader policy community about substance abuse and substance abuse policies including financing of substance abuse treatment, criminal justice interventions and treatment services.

Key Results

- Added substance abuse as a topic in the Health Policy Tracking Service (which is no longer part of NCSL).
- Created a [legislative tracking database](#).
- In 2004, published and distributed *Treatment of Alcohol and Other Substance Use Disorders: What Legislators Need to Know*, a primer and resource guide.
- Published 14 issue briefs and electronic newsletters every two weeks throughout the grant period reporting on current and emerging issues about substance abuse.
- Held 14 one-day conferences, briefings or workshops for state legislators and their staffs in 12 states.

Funding

RWJF made three grants totaling \$687,311 for this project from February 2002 through March 2007.

THE PROBLEM

Before this project began, according to the project director Allison Colker, JD, NCSL did not have a specific focus on substance abuse, and conversely, the substance abuse field did not pay attention to state legislators. Therefore, state legislators were inadequately

informed about substance abuse, substance treatment and related policies. In 1999, with support from the federal [Center for Substance Abuse Treatment](#) (CSAT), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) began tracking and analyzing state level substance abuse policies and legislation and dedicating sessions to the topic at conference meetings.

NCSL covers topics ranging from agriculture to budgets and taxation, energy, health finance, immigrant policy, transportation and more and provides research and education to state policy-makers.

In 2002, NCSL applied to RWJF for funding to enhance the work conducted under the CSAT contract. Project staff aimed to strengthen and expand the conference's substance abuse policy and legislation tracking and develop a permanent locus for substance abuse and substance abuse policy information within the conference.

CONTEXT

RWJF has addressed the issue of substance abuse through prevention efforts and subsequently efforts to improve treatment and to work with states on treatment policies. Its national program *Advancing Recovery: State/Provider Partnerships for Quality Addiction Care* supports partnerships between treatment provider organizations that deliver care and states that are in the unique role of being both the largest purchaser of publicly funded treatment services (70%) and regulators and licensers of those services. As of 2007, its continued work in substance abuse has aimed at vulnerable populations. (For more information see [Program Results Report](#).)

THE PROJECT

Between 2002 and 2007, RWJF provided NCSL with three grants to inform state legislators, staff and the broader policy community about an array of issues related to substance abuse, including financing of substance abuse treatment, criminal justice interventions and treatment services.

Two grants (ID#s 043872 and 050793) provided for the tracking of state substance abuse-related legislation across the country, producing information for legislators and others and communicating this information through a variety of publications and meetings.

A third grant (ID# 050207) provided for the printing and dissemination of a guidebook that served as a primer and resource guide on substance abuse for state legislators.

Activities

Project staff conducted the following activities:

- Researched and tracked state legislation and reported on topics such as:
 - Medicaid reimbursement for substance abuse treatment.
 - Health insurance parity for substance abuse treatment.
 - Treatment within the criminal justice system.
 - Drug courts and treatment in lieu of incarceration.
 - Treatment for women.
 - Treatment for methamphetamine abuse.
 - Licensing and credentialing for providers.
- Surveyed more than 250 state legislators and staff people to determine the range of substance abuse issues and priorities for upcoming legislative sessions.
- Established a technical advisory committee to advise NCSL staff on important and emerging substance abuse topics and to provide peer review of publications.
- Responded to requests from legislators, legislative staff and the public about topics including treatment, prevention and financing.
- Identified speakers to serve as presenters and panel members for one-day conferences, briefings and workshops for state legislators across the country.

Other Funding

The federal Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) provided approximately \$500,000 during the project period.

RESULTS

The project resulted in the following:

- **NCSL added substance abuse as a topic in the Health Policy Tracking Service** (no longer part of NCSL).
- **Project staff created a legislative tracking database and updated the information daily.**
- **Project director Colker wrote the 150-page, 2004 guidebook *Treatment of Alcohol and Other Substance Use Disorders: What Legislators Need to Know*.** The organization printed, marketed and distributed 1,000 copies of the guide to state legislators and agencies and nonprofit organizations working on substance abuse.

Guidebook chapters included the following:

- What Are Alcohol and Substance Use Disorders?
- What Are the Effects of Alcohol and Other Substance Use Disorders?
- Why Should Legislators Be Concerned about Alcohol and Other Substance Use Disorders?
- What Strategies are Available for the Treatment of Alcohol and Other Substance Use Disorders?
- What Funding is Available to States to Provide Treatment to People Affected by Alcohol and other Substance Use Disorders?

Appendices included:

- National resources for information on substance abuse treatment.
- State and jurisdictional resources.
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment Improvement Protocols.
- An overview of state laws requiring coverage of alcohol and other substance use disorder treatment.
- Alcohol taxes, by state.
- **Project staff wrote 14 issue briefs during the grant period and published electronic newsletters every two weeks on such topics as:**
 - Treatment for co-occurring mental illness and drug addiction.
 - Pharmacotherapy for alcoholism and drug addiction.
 - Prescription drug abuse.
 - State budget actions affecting public substance abuse services and systems.
 - Drug courts and treatment in lieu of incarceration.
 - Drug testing in schools.
 - Medical marijuana use.
 - Public and private financing of substance abuse prevention programs.

See the [Bibliography](#) for details.

- **Colker organized 14 one-day technical assistance conferences, briefings or workshops in 12 states**—including Arizona, Iowa, Kansas, Hawaii, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, South Dakota, Montana, Louisiana, West Virginia and Wisconsin—on topics such as:
 - Provider training and licensing.
 - Organization of services and needs assessment.
 - Medicaid and other treatment funding.
 - Cost-effective substance abuse treatment and program accountability.
 - Treatment for adolescents.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Plan ahead by building in project evaluations and long-term follow-up.** This will allow you to gauge the impact of your work on your target audience. (Project Director)

AFTERWARD

As of April 2008, NCSL continued to update the legislative tracking database with information on substance abuse and produce the electronic newsletter every two weeks on emerging substance abuse issues.

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