

For Immediate Release

Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and University Consortium Partner in \$3M project to Improve Use of Behavioral Health Metrics

Grappling with behavioral health problems, especially substance use and abuse and mental health issues, is a continual struggle for many communities across the country. A particular challenge for community leaders is that the occurrence of these issues varies tremendously from location to location. Therefore, it is important for local leaders to have access to accurate data about substance abuse in their specific geographic location, in order to be prepared and well-equipped to deal effectively with the issue. Michigan State University Professor Scott Loveridge is the director of a new national project called Community Assessment and Education to Promote Behavioral Health Planning & Education (CAPE), developed to provide resources for local decision makers to get a better understanding of the behavioral health concerns in their region.

“There are quite different ways how this plays out at the local level,” said Loveridge. “So we need to do a better job helping decision-makers figure out what’s going on in their communities, and do some early warning.” With funding from the Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and facilitated by the USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA/NIFA), CAPE’s goal is to look at ways in which local health decision makers are currently gaining information on the behavioral health practices in their communities and how access to needed information can be increased.

CAPE involves the collaboration of many partners. Brent Elrod, national program leader for community and rural development for USDA/NIFA, helped launch the program at the federal level by establishing an interagency agreement with SAMHSA and then the four regional rural development centers. “This is truly a collaborative effort. SAMHSA’s investment brings the expertise of the Regional Centers for Rural Development, our land-grant university partners, and the Cooperative Extension System to the ongoing effort to improve behavioral health outcomes in communities across America. Helping decision makers understand where to find the relevant data that is also specific to their locale will promote more effective behavioral health policies and programs.”

Dee Owens heads up SAMHSA’s Community Early Warning and Monitoring System (C-EMS). She is thrilled with the strong partnership aspect of the CAPE project, which will enhance the C-EMS goal of quickly getting behavioral health data into the hands of community health decision makers. “If we can work together in this project to get those measures, and get them into a tool-kit where they’re sensible and can be used, then at the community level you will be able to find out what’s going on and be able to target scarce resources where most needed.”

The project is tapping into land grant university resources across the country and in ten pilot communities. As a result of the project, the CAPE team will have an understanding of how local leaders are getting their community behavioral health information, and local leaders will have a tool-kit with sources of valuable data and training programs to inform their decision-making.

“Local leaders make very rational decisions based on the information that comes to them about their own program areas.” says Loveridge, “With this project, we hope to engage groups of them in holistic

decision-making that not only impacts their own areas but makes connections to upstream and downstream consequences as well.”

For more information about the community behavioral health benchmarking initiative, visit: <http://healthbench.info/> or follow the project on Twitter @healthbench.



In photo, left to right:

Stephan Goetz, Director, Northeast Regional Rural Development Center

Don Albrecht, Director, Western Rural Development Center

Scott Loveridge, Director, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development

Rachel Welborn, Program Manager, Southern Rural Development Center

Dee Owens, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Brent Elrod, National Program Leader for Community and Rural Development, USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture