



NIDA NOTES

News

Volume 13, Number 6 (March, 1999)

Des Moines Town Meeting Addresses Methamphetamine Abuse Epidemic in Iowa

By **Barbara Cire**, NIDA NOTES Associate Editor

The latest in NIDA's Town Meeting series, held in Des Moines in October, focused on an epidemic of methamphetamine use under way in Iowa. The meeting was cosponsored by the Governor's Alliance on Substance Abuse, the Iowa Department of Public Health, and the Office of the Mayor of Des Moines. More than 300 policymakers, civic leaders, scientists, State officials, drug abuse prevention and treatment practitioners, health care providers, law enforcement personnel, and members of the general public attended the meeting.

"Methamphetamine abuse has reached epidemic proportions and is reaching into more sectors of society," said NIDA Director Dr. Alan I. Leshner. He told participants that NIDA had recently issued a Community Drug Alert Bulletin on methamphetamine abuse. (See "[Tearoff](#)") "We are here today to provide you with information about the results of NIDA-supported research on methamphetamine and other drugs and to suggest how you can use this information to address local problems. We want you to tell us what you need in terms of science-based information and materials."

According to Iowa law enforcement personnel, the State has seen a recent and dramatic increase in the use of methamphetamine. During 1998, a special law enforcement team raided and shut down more than 200 clandestine methamphetamine labs where the drug was being illegally manufactured. In 1997, the team raided and closed 63 labs.



(Left to right) Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, NIDA Director Dr. Alan I. Leshner, and Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley at the Des Moines Town Meeting.

Iowa Governor Terry E. Branstad had invited NIDA to hold the meeting in Des Moines to address the State's methamphetamine problem. "Today's meeting reminds us of the need to work together across disciplines to address critical issues such as the increasing use of methamphetamine and marijuana by younger Iowans," said Governor Branstad. "The knowledge gained here will serve to enhance the good work already being performed in the areas of substance abuse prevention, treatment, and law enforcement in Iowa communities."

NIDA Associate Director Dr. Timothy P. Condon presented an overview of research on methamphetamine abuse, prevention, and addiction treatment. He also discussed the changing epidemiology of methamphetamine use. "In the past, typical methamphetamine users were white, male, high school graduates 20 to 35 years old



(Left to right) NIDA Director Dr. Alan I. Leshner, a Town Meeting participant, and Dale Woolery of the Iowa Governor's Alliance on Substance Abuse view a mock-up of a home-based methamphetamine lab.

and of low to moderate income," he said. "But, an increasing number of women and people older than 35 are beginning to use methamphetamine."

The day-long meeting featured discussions on how drugs work in the brain, advances in drug abuse prevention and addiction treatment, and how managed care affects drug abuse treatment services. Participants queried presenters about potential new treatments for methamphetamine addiction, ways of communicating with young people about the dangers of methamphetamine and other drugs, and how drugs cause changes in the brain.

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Wednesday, February 9, 2005.