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Constituents Help Shape NIDA's Research Agenda

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NIDA constituent groups have become instrumental in furthering the Institute's public health goals, NIDA Director Alan I. Leshner told participants at NIDA's Third Annual Constituent Conference in Lansdowne, Virginia. In particular, Dr. Leshner praised the groups for working together at previous meetings to formulate recommendations for NIDA activities.

Constituent input has helped the Institute pursue its dual public health missions of conducting drug abuse research and disseminating the findings in a form that the drug abuse field and the public can use and understand, Dr. Leshner said. In return, the constituents have benefited because their recommendations have guided the Institute in funding research that addresses the real-world needs of the field, he noted.

In the 3 years since its inception, the Constituent Conference has helped focus and strengthen this advisory role of constituent groups, Dr. Leshner said. The 2-day conference was attended this year by representatives from 150 organizations involved in the field of drug abuse. (See "Conference Draws More Constituents," p. 17.) The conference included both general sessions and informal work groups in which participants met to prepare this year's recommendations to the Institute.

As evidence of the constituents' prominent role in guiding the Institute, Dr. Leshner presented a "report card" on NIDA activities that address recommendations made by constituent representatives at previous conferences. The report card itemizes more than 300 activities that the Institute has undertaken in the broad areas of treatment research, HIV/AIDS research, prevention and epidemiology research, health services research, research training, information dissemination, and NIDA's organizational structure. Dr. Leshner highlighted several examples, including:

- funding 13 grants to study ways to link drug abuse treatment and medical care;

- planning a multicomponent treatment initiative for 1997 to improve the Institute's existing research to take treatments shown to be effective in small-scale studies and evaluate them in large-scale clinical studies;
- issuing a request for applications calling for collaboration among universities, research institutes, pharmaceutical industry to expedite transition of preclinical research findings on cocaine therapeutic studies;
- establishing a program to provide supplemental funding to ongoing research projects at the National Institute of Health for the study of issues related to drug abuse and HIV/AIDS;
- launching a methamphetamine research initiative and sponsoring a regional conference on methamphetamine to complement other national efforts to address increases in methamphetamine use in areas across the country; cosponsoring, with The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a National Conference on Drug Abuse Research (see "National Conference Showcases Effective Drug Abuse Prevention Programs," p. 8);
- cosponsoring a meeting covering prevention and treatment research on child and adolescent substance abuse at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry;
- funding new studies on the economics of treatment, barriers to access and utilization of treatment, interventions into practice, and the cost-effectiveness of treatment;
- cosponsoring, with the American Psychological Association, the Conference on Drug Abuse (COA) at the association's annual convention;
- holding several NIDA Town Meetings across the Nation to bridge the "great disconnect" between public perceptions and scientific facts about drug abuse; and upgrading and expanding the NIDA home page on the World Wide Web;
- establishing the new NIDA Regional Neuroimaging Center at Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, New York, in collaboration with the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and the U.S. Department of Energy; and
- expanding NIDA's National Advisory Council on Drug Abuse from 12 to 18 members.

"We were again pleased by the tremendous turnout for our conference," said Dr. Timothy P. Condon, NIDA director for science policy, whose office organized the meeting. "These meetings provide the Institute with an opportunity to help us ensure that NIDA's research is relevant, user friendly, and used."

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