

UW-CTRI News Release

University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention

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Midwest's First-Ever Comprehensive Study on High Tobacco Use/Tobacco-Related Deaths Among Those With Mental Illness and Other Addictions Underway

The University of Wisconsin Center for Tobacco Research and Intervention (UW-CTRI) today announced a new planning initiative to address high rates of smoking-related deaths among Wisconsin residents with mental illness and substance-use disorders. The study marks the first time anyone in the Midwest has comprehensively addressed tobacco use among this population, which can be as high as 90 percent. This contrasts with the general population's smoking rate of 20 percent.

The project, the Wisconsin Nicotine Treatment Integration Project: Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs and Tobacco Dependence (WiNTiP), will develop a plan by year's end to integrate evidence-based nicotine dependence treatment practices into Wisconsin's alcohol and other drug abuse, and mental health services. It is funded by the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program at the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services.

"Individuals with psychiatric and substance-used disorders die from tobacco use at four times the rate of the general population," said Dr. Eric Heiligenstein, medical director for WiNTiP. "With WiNTiP, we can now successfully treat these patients for nicotine dependence when they are receiving treatment for their mental health and substance-use disorders."

Of the nearly 7,800 annual Wisconsin deaths from tobacco, 3,400 (44 percent) are believed to be state residents with mental illness and substance-use disorders. These preventable deaths, and related diseases such as cancer, emphysema and heart disease, mean that people lose up to 25 years of their expected life spans.

"We will work with stakeholders from mental health, tobacco, AODA and governments to create a plan we can implement. We are the first Midwestern state to seriously tackle this challenge," said Bruce Christiansen, a UW-CTRI scientist.

"This saves lives and tax dollars," he continued. "WiNTiP will offer guidance for effectively changing Wisconsin's existing mental health, and alcohol and drug abuse programs

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and services. It will involve those concerned with reducing the disease, death and expensive health-care costs and lost productivity from smoking and chewing tobacco.”

David “Mac” Macmaster, managing consultant for the project, said, “The addiction field is ready to join forces with tobacco control in this effort. State Sen. Carol Roessler, chair of the Governor’s State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse, received unanimous support for a resolution calling for this WiNTiP planning process. The Wisconsin Alcohol and Drug Treatment Providers, the state’s alcohol and other drug counselors association and the state’s major advocacy association are also ready to sit down and begin the planning work ahead.

“We are reaching out to the mental health field to join the other partners, including the relevant government departments. We are optimistic WiNTiP will break new ground in treatment and recovery,” he concluded.

WiNTiP will deliver a final plan by Dec. 31, with recommendations for implementing the integration of the best practices for treating nicotine dependence into Wisconsin’s established mental health and addiction programs. The 2008 goal is to achieve support for the plan that, in turn, means reducing the tobacco death toll among this vulnerable population.

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