

DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG PROGRAMS

1700 K STREET
SACRAMENTO, CA 95811-4037
TDD (916) 445-1942

**ADP – Alcohol Awareness Month Op-Ed****April 4, 2008****Renée Zito- ADP Director**

In 2006, 43,000 Californians sought publicly funded treatment for alcohol addiction, including vulnerable populations like seniors and youth. But, recent studies show that more than 2.2 million people in our state meet the criteria for alcohol dependence or abuse. Costs associated with alcohol abuse in California now reach \$22.5 billion each year. In 2005, drunk driving caused 1,387 fatal accidents and 20,581 injury traffic accidents statewide. Alcohol abuse devastates families and communities. Treatment admissions in the state for alcohol dependence are second to methamphetamine. While drugs like methamphetamine make front page news, alcohol addiction is the “elephant in the room.”

Some individuals in California who abuse alcohol, deny or refuse to discuss their alcohol problem, while others do not seek treatment out of fear, shame or lack of information. Alcoholics and their families and friends hide the addiction, and the stigma attached to alcoholism remains.

We need to remind the millions of Californians who are struggling with alcohol abuse of a simple message: **Treatment works, and recovery happens.** That is why it is important for us to recognize April as “Alcohol Awareness Month.” This is a terrific forum in which to stimulate conversation about alcoholism, educate Californians about alcohol abuse, and urge abusers to get help.

Science has proven that alcoholism is a brain disease - a chronic condition that can be prevented and treated. Unlike an acute illness, say, appendicitis, we can't simply operate and make the person better. People who become addicted to alcohol will never be “cured”, but they can get well and recover. We now recognize that those who abuse alcohol need both acute care *and* ongoing monitoring.

What makes me so sure that treatment works and recovery happens?

Thirty years ago, alcoholism nearly devastated my family and my life. The disease almost wrecked my marriage, took away my self-esteem and livelihood, and would have killed me had I not sought help. In treatment, I discovered that I was genetically predisposed to alcoholism. Moreover, I learned I didn't have to face the condition myself. With treatment and family support, I got help – and I got better. I picked up the pieces of my life, marriage and career, and now, in a sweet bit of irony, I head the state's largest agency in the campaign against alcohol abuse.

The Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs offers a free, confidential alcohol screening tool that can alert individuals to a possible drinking problem at <http://www.alcoholscreening.org>. So, if your friend or loved one is abusing alcohol,



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For energy saving tips, visit the Flex Your Power website at
<http://www.fypower.org>

reach out to them. And if you yourself have problems with alcohol, I encourage you to seek treatment now. Remember: *Treatment works, and recovery happens.* I'm living proof.

Renée Zito is director of the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP). For more information on drug and alcohol treatment programs, contact the ADP Resource Center at (800) 879-2772 or visit www.adp.ca.gov.