



Department of Health & Social Services
Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation
Bethel Community Services Foundation

JOINT NEWS RELEASE

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
The City of Bethel

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Bethel Sobering Center opens today

Ellengcarvik • Xiq'udilanhoy Yix is the culmination of years of joint effort

The Bethel Sobering Center opens Thursday, Feb. 17 to provide a safe shelter for intoxicated people who currently pass through the local jail and hospital emergency room. The center will also free up space and staff time in those community resources.

The Sobering Center is the result of years of work by partners Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corp. (YKHC), the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Bethel Community Services Foundation and the City of Bethel.

“We are grateful for the support of our partners and committed to our joint effort to protect those who need a place to sober up safely and with dignity, and connect those who may have alcohol addiction concerns with possible interventions,” said Gene Peltola, YKHC president and chief executive. “The center also reduces the demand on our emergency room.”

Approximately 70 percent of people who need shelter to sober up are one-time users of the service, said center manager Rusty Tews. The 3,100-square-foot center, built by local workers and operated by YKHC, can accommodate 18 people. The capacity is based on demand in recent years.

The center initially will be open 24-hours Thursday through Monday and holidays. Staff members have an emergency medical certification and training on caring for intoxicated individuals safely and with respect.

Clients will receive a basic medical screening and be monitored while intoxicated. Once sober, clients will be offered a brief assessment of their alcohol use, drinking risk-reduction suggestions and referrals to treatment services.

The City of Bethel will transport inebriated people to the facility in Community Service Patrol vans. The DHSS Division of Behavioral Health supports the Sobering Center through grants to the City for its Community Service Patrol program and to YKHC.

“We’re delighted to help in this joint effort, which supports several department goals,” said William Streur, DHSS commissioner: “Local partnerships, protecting Alaskans’ safety, and linking clients with resources to prevent accidents and reduce alcohol abuse.”

The center has English, Yupik and Athabascan names, reflecting the people who live in the center’s lower Yukon-Kuskokwim service area and might need services if they come into Bethel and binge drink. Ellengcarvik (lung-CHAR-guh-vick) means “The Place To Become Aware” in Yupik; Xiq’udilanhoy Yix (HICK-oh-duh-LAN-hoy YUH) means “A Healing House” in Holikachuk Athabascan.

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