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Press Release

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Alaska celebrates programs that prevent and reduce underage drinking

Federally sponsored snapshot is part of video "quilt" documenting efforts nationwide

ANCHORAGE, AK — Underage drinking in Alaska is devastating, contributing to accidental deaths, suicides, unintentional pregnancy, fetal alcohol syndrome and more. Total financial costs were estimated at \$320.2 million in 2007. To help communities shift attitudes and change that reality, Alaska developed a video to share examples of successful efforts so communities can learn from each other and adopt proven strategies.

"It takes all of us to prevent underage drinking," Behavioral Health Division Director Melissa Witzler Stone stresses in the video.

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) produced Alaska's video as part of its project to document prevention in each state and territory.

Alaska's strategies featured in the video include:

- Limiting access to alcohol
 - A Barrow judge recounts the effect of the community's decision to allow alcohol: "Our criminal case load doubled when we went from being dry back to being damp — literally doubled."
- Community prevention & intervention programs
 - Many communities statewide use the Prime for Life educational program. It teaches first-time minor consuming offenders about the effects of alcohol, and is available for parents, too. One adoptive parent of children whose birth parents had drug and alcohol problems said the information is invaluable as she seeks to best support her at-risk children.
- Youth prevention & intervention programs
 - Alaska's Youth Courts tried 982 cases from July 2009-June 2010. Most involve alcohol. The legally binding restorative and rehabilitative justice program allows youth defendants to be judged and sentenced by their peers.

The video notes statistics that show Alaska is moving in the right direction. From 2003 to 2009, the percentage of students who had had one drink dropped to 67 percent from 75 percent; those who took their first drink before age 13 dropped to 17 percent from 23 percent.

Alaska's video is online at <http://vimeo.com/21490358>. All SAMHSA state and territory videos are at www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/StateVideos.aspx.

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