



CONTACT: Prabhu Ponshe, Health Matrix  
703-918-4930  
703-615-2466 (cell)  
Arlyn Riskind, Burness Communications  
301-652-1558

FOR RELEASE: May 26, 2004

## **MAJOR RESEARCH ORGANIZATION RECOMMENDS MONITORING SYSTEM TO PREVENT YOUTH PROBLEMS**

Washington, DC, May 26— The Society for Prevention Research (SPR), a leading international research organization, today urged federal, state and local governments in the U.S. to develop monitoring systems that will enable communities to track and prevent common youth problems such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use; anti-social behavior; depression; sexual behavior and academic failure.

“Imagine a day when knowing the teen drug use rates in your community and then deciding which prevention program to use is as simple as looking up the weather forecast on the internet and then deciding what to wear. As simplistic as it sounds, that is what a community monitoring system (CMS) can accomplish,” according to SPR President David Hawkins, Ph.D. Hawkins is director of the Social Research Development Group, and professor of social work at the University of Washington in Seattle.

“We already know the major problems facing our youth. We also know how to measure and track these problems and their predictors. And we know how to help prevent these problems by focusing on the predictors. What we don’t have is a national, state and local system that can pull this information together for communities in an easily accessible way,” Hawkins said.

SPR released its recommendations in a report, “Community Monitoring Systems: Tracking and Improving the Well-Being of America’s Children and Adolescents,” at its annual meeting in Quebec City, Canada. The report was funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through the National Science Foundation. SPR is headquartered in Washington, DC.

Anthony Biglan, Ph.D., incoming president of SPR and a co-author of the report, said “If CMS becomes a reality, we will make tremendous progress toward preventing young people from dying in alcohol-related car crashes, from becoming depressed and committing suicide, from taking up smoking and dying at an early age, from becoming pregnant during teenage years, from dropping out of school, or from entering a life of crime.” Biglan is a national expert on youth problems, such as tobacco and drug use. He is at the Oregon Research Institute, a private, non-profit research institute.

=MORE=

“Collecting, organizing and using community monitoring data might seem remote from the personal challenges of depression, drug use and academic failure facing a teenager. But communities that can monitor trends in depression, drug use and other youth problems may be help youth lead normal, healthy lives.

“A few communities have the ability to track some key indicators, such as teen pregnancy rates, suicide rates, alcohol use and other youth problems. Other communities also know positive youth behaviors. But we need these capabilities in every community, big and small,” Biglan said.

According to the report, some states such as Kansas, Oregon, Tennessee and Massachusetts, as well as some communities, such as Oswego County in New York; Cleveland; Seattle; and Decatur, Georgia; already have some form of community monitoring systems. These programs are a great beginning, but they need national, state and local level support to make them more effective.

Besides Hawkins and Biglan, the report was also authored by Patricia Mrazek, MSW, Ph.D.

The report recommends that the federal government should take a leadership role in supporting research to improve monitoring systems, support state and local infrastructures for CMS, and develop policies that encourage use of such systems.

Federal funding can be used to develop ways of sampling young people to get accurate estimates of various youth problems. This will standardize and reduce the cost of collecting data.

The report also recommends that states should collect, compile and analyze the data that can then be made available to communities. It recommends that communities develop consensus about what youth behaviors, and the predictors of those behaviors, that need to be monitored. The report also suggests that community agencies adopt monitoring systems as an integral part of their decision-making process.

The Society for Prevention Research is an international organization focused on the advancement of science-based prevention programs and policies through empirical research. The membership of the organization includes scientists, practitioners, advocates, administrators and policymakers who are concerned with the prevention of social, physical and mental health problems and the promotion of health, safety and well being.

Copies of the report are available on the SPR website, [www.preventionresearch.org](http://www.preventionresearch.org).

=END=