



Contact: Pam McKeown  
ODMHSAS Public Information  
(405) 522-5102

Feb. 13, 2004

**GOVERNOR'S 'BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE' TO STUDY COST OF UNTREATED MENTAL ILLNESS, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN STATE**

Costs associated with untreated mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence issues in Oklahoma will be the focus of a new "blue ribbon task force" appointed by Gov. Brad Henry.

Approximately 15 Oklahomans – representing areas from health care to journalism to public policy – will meet Thursday, Feb. 19, 1:30 p.m., in the Governor's Blue Room at the state capitol. The Governor's Task Force on Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence will be joined by Gov. Henry, Attorney General Drew Edmondson, and leaders from both the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS), and the Attorney General's Office, at its first meeting.

Members of the task force include: Tom Adelson, secretary of health, Tulsa; Jack Turner, ODMHSAS board member, Oklahoma City; the Rev. Dick Virtue, Norman; Jeff Tallent, Oklahoma City chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill; Sue Buck, ODMHSAS board member, Hugo; Gov. Bill Anoatubby, Ada; Robin Parrish, Governor's Office, Oklahoma City; Roger Webb, president of the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond; Frank Merrick,

Oklahoma City; Janet Pearson, Tulsa World; Dr. Mike Anderson, Presbyterian Health Foundation, Oklahoma City; Bob Spinks, United Way of Metro Oklahoma City; Sandra Naifeh, mayor of Edmond; and Joe Hight, managing editor of *The Daily Oklahoman*.

(more)

task force/2

“All of these individuals understand the devastating impact of untreated mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence issues on Oklahoma,” said Dr. Terry Cline, state mental health commissioner. “Every Oklahoman, in one way or another, is affected by these issues.”

Untreated, under-treated or improperly treated mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence concerns are “major” health problems in Oklahoma, Cline added. Either alone or combined, these three areas are directly linked to increases in fatalities, incarcerations, suicides, domestic problems, welfare rolls, homelessness, school dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, excessive employee absenteeism, unemployment or underemployment, higher workers’ compensation costs, and numerous other health, criminal justice, social and personal problems that cost Oklahoma taxpayers billions of dollars each year.

“The task force will study the spectrum of costs associated with mental illness, substance abuse and domestic violence,” said Cline. “I think the task force will find there are incredible costs associated with these three areas. Most people are not aware of the associated cost, so this will shed some light on the expense to the state – both the public and private sectors. In 1998, a similar task force, which studied only the costs of untreated substance abuse in Oklahoma, found that substance abuse alone costs our state nearly \$7 billion a year.”

In December, the newly appointed task force will release a report regarding its findings.

“Hopefully, this study will allow us to more clearly identify costs associated with these areas,” Cline said. “As a result, we can direct resources in the future in the most efficient, cost-effective manner possible for the state of Oklahoma.”

# # #