

## **Medical journal reports on potential research strategies to fight high rates of Arctic suicide, depression and alcoholism**

ARLINGTON, VA, FEBRUARY 12, 2010 – A medical journal focusing on health issues in the Arctic has published the proceedings of a groundbreaking meeting that centered on research addressing the disproportionately high rates of suicide, depression and alcoholism among Arctic residents, the U.S. Arctic Research Commission (USARC) announced today. The meeting was co-sponsored by the USARC and the Fogarty International Center (FIC) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

“Research to respond to these problems has been a long time coming and we’re trying to make up for lost time,” said Mead Treadwell, Chair of the USARC. The most recent suicide rates in Alaska, from 2006, indicate a statewide incidence of 20.3 per 100,000 people as compared to the nationwide rate of 11 per 100,000, according to a study, prepared by Alaska Injury Prevention Center, titled “Suicide Follow-back Study 2006.” The rate of suicide among Alaska’s Native population is also much higher than that of the non-Native population. “To date, there has been little substantive or dedicated federally supported research in this area. It’s time to get started,” said Treadwell.

The meeting’s primary goal was to initiate a process to develop a long-term plan to improve Arctic behavioral and mental health research. A coordinated research effort among partners from state, federal and international governments, research institutions, private enterprises with a significant role played by the Arctic’s indigenous populations, would look at many factors in reducing behavioral health concerns.

The meeting held in Anchorage, Alaska, on June 2-3, 2009, focused on the acute behavioral and mental health issues faced by pan-Arctic communities. Participants were local, indigenous and invited scientific experts and others representing a wide range of interests. The proceedings from the meeting, “Report of the Behavioral and Mental Health Research in the Arctic: Strategy Setting Meeting” in the *International Journal of Circumpolar Health* (IJCH 68(5), 64 pages, ISSN 1797-2361 print, ISSN 1797-237X, are available online at [www.arctic.gov](http://www.arctic.gov). During the conference, Treadwell called for thorough and open cooperation among federal, state and local stakeholders and funding agencies, in particular incorporating the viewpoints of the Arctic’s indigenous people. “Dedicated Arctic behavioral health funding is minimal despite the enormous health disparities and problems when compared to the lower 48 states.”

Treadwell stated that USARC is determined to see that an effective Arctic mental health research program is launched. “This requires engaging both the research and regional Arctic communities. The Commission is working with the State of Alaska, tribal entities, international partners, and other federal agencies to see that this goal is met. We are focused and committed to the effort of stabilizing an Arctic health research program in order to guarantee the necessary health research improvement.” High among the recommendations of the meeting is to fund the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science to conduct a study of the research needed to improve Arctic mental health.

The Arctic human health initiative is one of five interagency themes represented in the Commission’s *Report on Goals and Objectives for Arctic Research*. “While this has been adopted as a goal for some time, integrated Arctic health research is just getting started,” added Treadwell.

USARC works with the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC) to develop national Arctic research projects and a five-year plan to implement those projects. A U.S. research plan in behavioral and mental health research in the Arctic will ultimately be presented to the IARPC for adoption and implementation.

The U.S. Congress established the USARC under the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984 (as

amended). The Commission's duties include recommending Arctic research policies and priorities to the President and Congress and promoting cooperation and data sharing. The USARC has offices in Arlington, Virginia, and Anchorage, Alaska. Additional information is available at [www.arctic.gov](http://www.arctic.gov).

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