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Chittenden County Invited to Join National Project to Pilot Use of Community Behavioral Health Metrics and Planning

Burlington, VT – Grappling with behavioral health problems, especially substance use disorder and mental health issues, is a continual struggle for many communities across the country. A particular challenge for community leaders is that the occurrence of these issues varies tremendously from location to location. Therefore, it is important for local leaders to have access to accurate data about behavioral health problems in their specific geographic location. Dr. Jane Kolodinsky, Director of the Center for Rural Studies and Chair of the Department of Community Development and Applied Economics at the University of Vermont, is leading a team, in Chittenden County, which was recently invited to join a new national project called Community Assessment and Education to Promote Behavioral Health Planning & Education (CAPE). Joining Dr. Kolodinsky is Kelly Hamshaw, a research specialist from the Center for Rural Studies, and Melanie Needle, a senior planner from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission.

With funding from the Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and facilitated by the USDA, CAPE will explore how local health decision-makers are currently gaining information on the behavioral health problems in their communities and how they access needed information and data for coordinating local efforts. The CAPE project was developed to provide resources for local decision makers to get a better understanding of the behavioral health concerns in their region. "There are quite different ways how this plays out at the local level," said Loveridge. "So we need to do a better job helping decision-makers figure out what's going on in their communities, and do some early warning."

CAPE involves the collaboration of many partners. Brent Elrod, national program leader for community and rural development at USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture, helped launch the program at the federal level. "This is truly a collaborative effort. SAMHSA's investment brings the expertise of the Regional Centers for Rural Development, our land-grant university partners, and the Cooperative Extension System to the ongoing effort to improve behavioral health outcomes in communities across America. Helping decision-makers understand where to find the relevant data that is also specific to their locale will promote more effective behavioral health policies and programs."

Dee Owens heads up SAMHSA's Community Early Warning and Monitoring System (C-EMS). She is thrilled with the strong partnership aspect of the CAPE project, which will enhance the C-EMS goal of



quickly getting behavioral health data into the hands of community health decision-makers. “If we can work together in this project to get those measures, and get them into a tool-kit where they’re sensible and can be used, then at the community level you will be able to find out what’s going on and be able to target scarce resources where most needed.”

The project is tapping into land grant university resources across the country and also localized innovations from the 10 pilot communities. As a result of the project, the CAPE team will gain an understanding of how local leaders are getting their community behavioral health information, and local leaders will have a tool-kit with sources of valuable data and training programs to inform their decision-making. “We are very excited to have Chittenden County chosen as a pilot site. This project aims at developing evidence-based approaches for tackling these critical issues facing our community,” said Kolodinsky.

The Chittenden County CAPE team will be contacting stakeholders in the community for input on which behavioral health issues are important to them and how they get information on trends during Phase 1 of this project. Please contact Kelly Hamshaw at the UVM Center for Rural Studies for more information, at 802-656-1219 or Kelly.Hamshaw@uvm.edu. For more information about the national community behavioral health benchmarking initiative, visit: <http://healthbench.info/> or follow the project on Twitter @healthbench.

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