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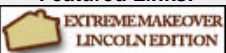
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Originally Published Online: Friday, May 12, 2006 - 11:21:30 am CDT

**Meth study: More treatment needed**  
By SCOTT BAUER / The Associated Press

The methamphetamine crisis reveals shortcomings in Nebraska's system established to deal with addicts, according to a new report from the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Dealing with meth addicts is not complicated, the report said, but the challenge lies in manifesting the will to establish a complete continuum of assessment, treatment and recovery.

The report, authored primarily by UNO Juvenile Justice Institute Director Hank Robinson, is a follow-up to one issued in December. Commissioned by the Legislature, it was delivered to the Community Corrections Council, a group of policy makers, police and treatment specialists.

Contrary to popular belief, those addicted to meth typically have a host of other substance abuse problems and are not singularly dependent only on meth, the report said.

While methamphetamine "is a terribly dangerous drug with which to flirt," the report finds that people who have experimented with it do not inevitably become addicted.

"The quicker someone seeks help with their drug and alcohol problems, the easier it will be to fight back an addiction to methamphetamine or any other drug," Robinson said in the report.

The challenge for Nebraska, Robinson writes, is that it must develop treatment strategies that address the more common addict who also has other substance abuse issues.

"Studies show that as addicts receive treatment for their 'primary' dependency on methamphetamine, many compensate by increasing their use of alcohol and marijuana," the study concluded.

Nebraska's current overall system of addressing substance abuse is inadequate, Robinson said.

"Alcoholics are taught that recovery is a lifelong process," the report said. "As a state, however,

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Nebraska has been slow to accept that not only is it a long-term process for the individual, it also demands a long-term commitment from society.”

There is a shortage of substance abuse clinicians and treatment professionals in the state, resulting in waiting lists at every level of service, the report said.

The solution to the problems rests with the state’s ability to quickly put in place clinicians and treatment specialists to fill the gaps, the report said.

Of the estimated 20,000 people in Nebraska who are addicted to meth, about 8,000 a year are processed through the criminal justice system but not sentenced to prison. With appropriate outpatient treatment, those patients will not have to be placed in a centralized facility, the study found.

There is another group of about 530 meth users who will be sentenced to prison. The best way to treat them is to isolate them from the rest of the prison population and put them in a specialized treatment center, the report said.

That can be done either with separate wings in an existing prison or an entirely new building, the report said.

The state should not build a prison-based meth treatment center for those who can be dealt with at community-based facilities, the study found.

There is some good news in the report. It concludes that tighter controls on the sale of key meth ingredient pseudoephedrine should reduce the supply of the drug in the state.

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