



For Immediate Release

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***ENZI CALLS FOR MORE STREAMLINED, FLEXIBLE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS***

**Washington D.C.** – U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today said that Congress needs to strengthen the nation’s substance abuse and mental health care delivery system by making it more streamlined and giving local communities the flexibility to meet their unique needs.

“Today’s system of services for mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness is fragmented and disconnected. This is due, in large part, to the many reforms and policy changes imposed upon the agency over the years,” Enzi said. “States and local communities, who are on the front lines, can provide the best approach to the prevention and treatment of mental health, substance abuse and homelessness. This strategy will assist in ensuring scarce dollars are focused where the greatest need exists.”

“The solutions for treating and preventing mental health issues, substance abuse, and homelessness lie within the states, communities, and individuals who see first hand, everyday, the destruction and challenges these issues can cause.”

Enzi made his comments at a HELP Committee hearing titled “Transforming Mental Health and Substance Abuse Systems of Care: Community Integration and Recovery.” The hearing marks the beginning of the legislative process to reauthorize the Substance Abuse and Mental Services Administration (SAMHSA).

“The issues we face in the reauthorization of SAMHSA are among the most important issues Congress can address, that is, the health and well-being of our citizens,” Enzi said. “We have made great strides in recognizing that mental health and substance abuse are illnesses that, like physical illnesses, are treatable, especially when the course of treatment begins as early as possible.

“I look forward to using the reauthorization process to assess SAMHSA’s operations and making any necessary changes to ensure that it is operating at optimum levels.”

Enzi said that Congress must address the growing epidemic of methamphetamine use in the United States. Statistics show that approximately 5 percent of the U.S. population is addicted to methamphetamine, and Wyoming is among the top third of states with persons 12 or older using the drug.

“Of Wyoming students that have used methamphetamine, more than 45 percent reported seriously considering suicide and nearly one in three actually attempted suicide,” Enzi said. “Methamphetamine use, in particular, played a large role in rising rates in crime, domestic violence, and poor health in Wyoming. Rural communities and Native Americans have been especially hard hit by methamphetamine.”

“Wyoming has taken steps to reduce and hopefully eliminate the use of methamphetamine. Already, methamphetamine use in Wyoming high schools has decreased by 27 percent between 2003 and 2005. People in Wyoming are getting treatment for methamphetamine addiction at higher rates than before. Eradication of this epidemic is in our grasp and I hope to explore SAMHSA’s role in this critical effort.”

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**Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions**

***“Transforming Mental Health Systems of Care: Community Integration and Recovery”***

**OPENING STATEMENT**

**SENATOR MICHAEL B. ENZI**

May 8, 2007

Good morning. I would like to thank Chairman Kennedy and Senator Reed for holding this important hearing today. Also, I would like to thank the witnesses for taking time out of your schedules to be here. I particularly want to thank Rodger McDaniel for traveling here from my home state of Wyoming to represent the Wyoming Department of Health.

I am pleased we are working in a bipartisan fashion to reauthorize the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration—known as SAMHSA. Congress established SAMHSA to strengthen the nation’s health care delivery system with regard to the prevention and treatment of mental illness and substance abuse, and also to provide emergency disaster assistance and to combat homelessness.

The issues we face in the reauthorization of SAMHSA are among the most important issues Congress can address, that is, the health and well-being of our citizens. I am

gratified that we have come a long way in addressing these problems through the many successes of SAMHSA and in recognizing that mental health and substance abuse are illnesses are treatable.

The Committee needs to assess SAMHSA's operations, and make changes to ensure that it is operating at the highest possible level of efficiency. SAMHSA currently measures outcomes, and that will be of great benefit as we work through the reauthorization. As many of my colleagues are aware, today's system of services for mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness is fragmented and disconnected. These challenges will be addressed in the reauthorization process. States and local communities can provide the best approach to prevention and treatment, because they are the front lines and in the best position to develop creative solutions.

I am also interested in evaluating the flexibility of SAMHSA's grant programs, as well as the accountability measures. We need to ensure that scarce federal dollars are focused where the greatest need exists.

In light of recent tragedies like Hurricane Katrina and Rita, and the events at Virginia Tech last month, it is important that we review the role of SAMHSA in disaster and emergency response. SAMHSA serves a key role in events like these, so flexibility in the use of these funds is key to ensuring that the programs can adapt to changing needs, or target specific situations.

I also must mention the epidemic of methamphetamine, or meth, in the United States. Statistics show that approximately 5 percent of the population in the United States is addicted to it. Meth is a highly addictive drug, and easily produced in clandestine laboratories with inexpensive, over-the-counter products. Wyoming is among the top third of states with persons aged 12 or older using meth. Wyoming students have been hit hard. Drug related arrests have doubled in Wyoming with meth playing a large role in rising rates in crime, domestic violence, and poor health. Rural communities and Native Americans have been especially hard hit. Eradication of this epidemic is in our grasp and I hope to explore SAMHSA's role in this critical effort. Fixing this problem will require both short and long term strategies.

Again, I want to thank the witnesses for their participation in today's hearing, and I look forward to their testimony.

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