Behavioral Health, Substance Abuse

Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health
Anchorage, Alaska

Assignment Description

The fellow position is located with the Injury Surveillance Program (ISP), which is housed in the Section of Epidemiology, Division of Public Health, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. ISP works closely with the Division of Behavioral Health on several on-going projects including the Alaska substance abuse profile and expanded toxicology surveillance projects. The missions of DHSS and Divisions of Public Health and Behavioral Health are to protect and promote the health of Alaskans, to which our responsibilities are to:

• Monitor health status to identify community health problems
• Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community
• Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues
• Mobilize the community partnerships to identify and solve health problems
• Develop policies and plans that support individual and community efforts
• Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety
• Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable
• Assure a competent public health and personal health workforce
• Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services
• Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems

Day-to-Day Activities

The fellow can expect to be involved with arranging and coordinating epidemiologic substance abuse and treatment studies (e.g., prescription drug abuse and heroin use), including GIS spatial analyses and developing, implementing, and managing informatics projects, as needed for the Injury Surveillance Program (ISP) and Substance Abuse Workgroups. The fellow can also expect to be involved in substance abuse health impact projects for the Section of Epidemiology.

The fellow will be critical to expanding the ISP toxicological surveillance efforts to maintain and utilize the state-based Alaska Violent Death Reporting System (AKVDRS) opioid prescription drug module. The fellow would also help in collecting information on prescription drug abuse from several sources in the state, analyzing data, and presenting findings to our partners including military and veteran healthcare agencies.

The fellow will become familiar with AKVDRS and the associated databases, interpret toxicology results, and communicate data results via written reports and oral presentations. The fellow will also be involved in developing an approach to analyzing health surveillance and treatment data from a variety of state and tribal sources and responding to community and agency substance abuse data requests for prevention projects in Alaska. A portion of each day will be spent in planning and reviewing project progress with public health and behavioral health mentors.
**Potential Projects**

**Surveillance**  
**Health Impact of Prescription and Illicit Drug (PID) Use Among Alaskans**  
The fellow will work with the State Epidemiologist, ISP staff, and Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) staff to construct a PID health impact report. The fellow will be responsible for evaluating current PID data collected by AKVDRS and other DHSS programs, evaluating expanded toxicology for all unexpected deaths (initiated in January 2015), and developing an annual report.

**Surveillance**  
**Evaluation of Prescription and Illicit Opioid Overdose Surveillance**  
The fellow will work with the ISP staff, Div. of Public Health Opioid Workgroup members, and key data providers (e.g., hospital / emergency discharge data, Medicaid data, treatment data) to evaluate current OPR surveillance, identify data gaps, develop web-based information and visual graphics using InstantAtlas, and develop recommendations to enhance pharmacovigilance.

**Major Project**  
**Marijuana Surveillance and Prevention Activities**  
The fellow will work with the State Epidemiologist and the State Substance Abuse Epidemiology and DPH Marijuana Workgroups to build and expand the multi-agency surveillance system for marijuana use and associated morbidity and mortality. Surveillance data will be incorporated into the Alaska-Indicator-based Information System (AK-IBIS) as part of Alaska’s Substance Use Profile. The fellow will also be involved in outreach to prevent adverse health consequences of marijuana use, focusing on prevention in higher risk populations such as adolescents and use prevention in pregnant women.

**Additional Project**  
**Enhanced Electronic Dissemination of Public Health Data**  
The fellow will have the opportunity to work with the State Epidemiologist and the State Substance Abuse Epidemiology Workgroup to review and evaluate Alaska’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) data, develop customer satisfaction surveys to assess knowledge of recent regulatory changes, and participate in a project to augment the use of the PDMP report features (i.e., solicited and unsolicited reports) to enhance clinical decision-making, and its assess the impact of these PDMP features. Information will be presented to the Board of Pharmacy and other state and national venues.

**Additional**  
**Behavioral Health Special Interest Project**  
The fellow will have the opportunity to identify areas of interest to participate in development, implementation, and/or evaluation of a new or establish program or project in either Division.
**Preparedness Role**

The fellow would have the opportunity to become involved with the Section of Epidemiology's Emergency Preparedness Workgroup and collaborate with mental health professionals within the Division of Behavioral Health to review and assess capacity to respond to mental health needs during and after a disaster.

**Additional Activities**

- Select Projects for Community-based Health Impact Assessment
- Assessing Self-Harm among Veterans

**Mentors**

**Primary**
Joe McLaughlin, MD, MPH  
State Epidemiologist

**Secondary**
Deborah Hull-Jilly, MPH  
Injury Epidemiologist / Health Program Manager III