

## **Facility is for just those in corrections system**

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Since the Nexus Treatment Program is run by the Department of Corrections, its clientele will be limited.

"And that's my major frustration," said Mike Thatcher of Community, Counseling and Correctional Services, which will be running the program. "I can't imagine the number of people who need treatment but haven't been through the corrections system yet."

Thatcher said 80 percent to 90 percent of the inmates at the pre-release centers, transitional centers and juvenile detention centers that CCCS operates admit an addiction to meth, frequently in conjunction with other drugs and alcohol.

"People who need treatment either have to be able to pay for it privately or they won't get it without going to prison," he noted.

And it doesn't make sense to wait until the problem is so severe that a person has to be imprisoned, he added.

"From a taxpayer's standpoint, there are savings to providing those services earlier," Thatcher said. "You can either pay for it now or pay for it later, after years of a criminal lifestyle."

There's no clear picture of the unmet need for meth treatment, said Jackie Jandt of the state's Chemical Dependency Bureau.

She cited figures from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which did household telephone surveys and estimated that 9.4 percent of Montana's population needed treatment for alcoholism in the past year and didn't receive it, while another 2.8 percent needed treatment for drug addiction in the past year and didn't receive it.

But she cautioned that those figures are probably understated. "Why would anyone admit to using illicit drugs to someone who called on the phone to ask?" she wondered.

So the message is clear to her.

"We're not even meeting basic treatment needs," said Jandt. "There are waiting lists for people who need to get into treatment for everything, including alcohol."

She also said health officials are learning that meth requires long-term treatment.

The health department equivalent to Nexus is the Montana Chemical Dependency Center in Butte, which doesn't focus on meth treatment.

"Alcohol continues to be the state's drug of choice so that's our focus, followed by pot and then by opiates, things like Oxycontin, cocaine, heroin and methadone," said MCDC Director Dave Peshek.

MCDC has done away with the standard 30-day treatment program and now keeps patients until they complete an individualized treatment plan.

"We plan for about 45 days of treatment, and our average length of stay is 38 days," said Peshek.

But MCDC has actually seen a decline in the number of meth addicts it has been treating, he said.

"It has dropped pretty significantly," Peshek said. "When we started, it used to be 22-23 percent of our clientele. Now it's down around 17-18 percent."

And he said success rates don't appear to be appreciably different for methamphetamine or other drugs.