NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

New Hampshire Sees Alarming Rise in Drug-Addicted Infants

As heroin and prescription drug abuse rises in New Hampshire, doctors are seeing more babies born addicted to opioids, a condition known as Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), reports the *New Hampshire Union Leader.*

Opioids are drugs that are prescribed to control pain. They can be highly addictive and – when used improperly or abused – they can even be deadly.

From 2003 to 2009, the state's reported incidents of addicted babies rose 600 percent, according to Dr. William H. Edwards. In 2009, New Hampshire reported 116 infants born with NAS, more than five times as many as in 2000, according to a report released last fall by the New Hampshire Bureau of Drug and Alcohol Services and the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation.

"It really is an epidemic," said Edwards, section chief of neonatology at the Children's Hospital at Dartmouth-Hitchcock (CHaD) in Lebanon. "It's an astounding problem, and it needs to be recognized."

Similar local trends have been seen across the country with increases in the number of drug-addicted babies also reported in states like Tennessee and Maine.

In addition to the health consequences associated with NAS, there is an astounding financial toll as most of the expensive hospital bills pertaining to these babies' withdrawal treatment are paid by Medicaid. According to a national study by the American Hospital Association, state Medicaid programs paid the hospital bills for about 78 percent of addicted newborns.

The study also found the national cost of health care for these babies has nearly quadrupled from 2000 to 2009, rising from $190 million to $720 million, and that average hospital costs for NAS babies rose from $39,400 to $53,400 during that time.