

Anti-drug campaigns are welcome in Wyoming

Wyoming will soon see two very different campaigns to encourage people to stop drug abuse.

The state should benefit from both efforts.

The Wyoming Department of Health sponsored an aggressive anti-meth campaign that ended in 2007. The work the state campaign began will be carried on by the privately funded Wyoming Meth Project, which is based upon a successful Montana program.

There has been much progress in the fight against meth in recent years. In addition to the state's campaign, the Casper Meth Initiative did a lot of important work, including hosting several statewide conferences on meth abuse. The initiative also made the campaign to build a residential treatment center for meth addicts a priority.

Now, the state plans to shift its focus to fighting alcohol and tobacco use with a \$1.7 million marketing campaign that will bring another important message to the entire state.

The goal of the state's effort is to remove drinking and smoking from Wyoming's "culture." Rather than hammering home the message about how the substance can harm the user's life, the campaign asks people to consider how their decisions affect others.

It's an interesting approach that Department of Health official Rodger McDaniel says is aimed at sparking discussions. The agency wants people to think about what happens when their behavior crosses the line and harms someone else.

The slogan, "Where do you draw the line?" will be accompanied by actual green lines that will be drawn at prominent locations in communities. If it catches on, the message could be quite effective.

Our support for the new program does-

n't mean we think the state should abandon its anti-meth efforts. It definitely shouldn't.

In Natrona County, the number of people who report methamphetamine as their primary drug has dropped from 27 percent to 11 percent. But that still means it's a significant problem, and it's one that the state health department must continue to actively address. The fight against meth is far from over in Wyoming.

Our view

Two new campaigns should raise awareness about drug abuse in Wyoming.

What do you think?

We welcome viewpoints from our readers on this and other issues.

The Wyoming Meth Project will launch its campaign with advertisements that are both graphic and highly disturbing. Some of the ads depict kids smoking, snorting or shooting the drug, stealing, and selling their bod-

ies to acquire meth. Others discuss the physical, mental and emotional toll the drug takes on users. The slogan is, "Meth — Not even once."

(Full disclosure: Star-Tribune Publisher Nathan Bekke serves on the Wyoming Meth Project's board of directors.)

In Montana, a similar campaign coincided with a dramatic drop in the use of meth. The state was ranked the fifth highest in meth abuse, and fell to No. 39. Teen meth use dropped by nearly 50 percent during the same period. Because of such success, several other states have adopted the campaign.

In Wyoming, there should be room for both a graphic campaign aimed at individuals and one that's focused on sparking community action. The state should consider adapting its anti-alcohol, anti-tobacco campaign to include methamphetamine and other drugs.

The state can't afford to sit on the sidelines and watch when it comes to meth; it must be an active participant along with the Wyoming Meth Project. The more public awareness there is about drug abuse, chances are greater that people will stop risking their own lives and the lives of others.