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## **Panel Calls for States to Lead Fight Against Addiction**

(Boston, Mass.): States will never be able to significantly reduce the number of their citizens with drug and alcohol problems unless they change the way they currently address these issues, according to a bipartisan policy panel convened by Join Together, a project of the Boston University School of Public Health, and chaired by former Massachusetts Governor and presidential candidate Michael Dukakis.

States bear many of the costs of alcohol and other drug addiction, spending an estimated 13 percent of their budgets on addiction-related problems, the "Blueprint for the States" policy panel noted in its "Policies to Improve the Ways States Organize and Deliver Alcohol and Drug Prevention and Treatment" report.

However, the report noted, "Less than four percent of this is spent on prevention and treatment, while more than 96 percent pays for the avoidable social and physical consequences that result from our failure to apply what we know about how to prevent and treat substance-use problems." These costs include child welfare, prison, court, police, and Medicaid expenditures for treating medical problems related to addictive illnesses.

"We were struck by the consensus that emerged in our hearings about the many strategies that can be pursued at surprisingly low cost. We also found what is missing: leadership at the top and strategies that use the range of tools that states already have," the panelists wrote.

The panel issued a series of recommendations to state leaders on how to more effectively address alcohol and drug problems. They called for states to vest responsibility for implementing their statewide alcohol and other drug strategy in an entity "at the highest possible level in state government" that reports directly to the governor.

Other recommendations include:

- Developing a statewide strategy that includes all agencies affected by drug and alcohol problems;
- Increasing accountability for all state agencies working on issues related to addiction;
- Raising alcohol taxes to help pay for drug and alcohol services;

- Training judges to address alcohol and other drug use among defendants and improve coordination with treatment services; and
- Creating state alcohol and other drug policy advisory boards, answerable to the governor and lawmakers, that includes representatives from the recovering community and civic leaders.

"I know of no task that is more important than the prevention and treatment of alcohol and drug problems. The toll that they are taking in this country is almost incalculable in personal as well as financial terms. The states must take the lead, and it can't be a one time thing. Tenacity and consistency are critically important if we are going to win this battle," said Michael Dukakis.

Background on the Blueprint for the States policy panel and free downloads of the panel's report and recommendations can be found on the Join Together website:  
<http://www.jointogether.org/aboutus/policy-panels/blueprint/>.

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Join Together ([www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org)) is a program of the Boston University School of Public Health. Since 1991 it has been the nation's leading provider of information, strategic planning assistance, and leadership development for community-based efforts to advance effective alcohol and drug policy, prevention, and treatment. It is funded by individual donors and foundations, with major support from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ([www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org)).