

## **National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers View on the proposed merger of NIAAA and NIDA**



In broad business terms, it is always appropriate to examine whether or not the consolidation of organizations will achieve cost savings, efficiencies and a structure which can respond to the changing environment in ways that the former entities could not. To consider such options in the case of **NIAAA (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)** and **NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse)** is certainly appropriate, it is just not advisable!

Within the political and public policy climate, it has been fashionable for our country to focus on the impact of drugs (legal and illegal) within our society. This has occurred at the expense of focus on and attention to alcohol which remains the number one problematic drug in our society. Witness the continued disturbing “split” within the **Office of National Drug Control Policy** where the charter of this organization makes it impossible to address or to craft a policy which incorporates alcohol into a national drug control policy.

The fact that we have two separate institutes under **NIH** may be an administrative challenge, but it nevertheless serves as a firewall against the complete ignoring of alcohol as the number one drug in this country. The National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers believes that we need to hold true to the principles espoused by Senator Harold E. Hughes who was the moving force behind the Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Act of 1970 (Public Law 91-616) which established NIAAA. Recognition of Alcohol as a drug and of the outrageous effects of the disease known as alcoholism has served us well! To diminish this impact, to lessen this recognition will not serve us well in the years ahead.

In the early years, NIAAA was an Institute with whom the providers of addiction treatment felt comfortable worked with and supported. Over the past decade, that relationship has become strained and to some extent fractured. Less and less emphasis has been placed on researching the impact of the disease of alcoholism on our society and on researching the impact of treatment and examining treatment efficacy. More emphasis has shifted to researching alcohol and its impact on the body and attempting to build an understanding of “problem drinkers” as opposed to embracing the understanding of alcoholism as a primary disease.

At the same time the overall budget for NIDA has grown to the point where it is approximately 57% larger than the annual budget for NIAAA. Any merger of these two institutes would ultimately result in reduced resources being allocated to alcoholism which are already receiving less than their fair share.

Because of the issues raised above, the National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers opposes a consolidation of NIAAA and NIDA. NAATP believes that both institutes have a unique mission which needs to be protected and expanded. Instead of a merger, we urge NIH to commit itself to returning to some of the original principles which led to the creation of both NIAAA and NIDA and to reconnect itself to its partners on the treatment side, especially in the private sector and again establish itself as a leading voice for understanding addiction as a primary disease and for promoting treatment which goes well beyond the reduction of heavy drinking days per month, but which promotes long term recovery. We believe that this is best accomplished through maintaining two separate institutes; NIAAA and NIDA.