



American Association of Poison Control Centers

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
March 6, 2013

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Poison Center Leaders Visit Capitol Hill to Highlight Importance of America's Local Poison Centers

Further Cuts to Federal Funding for Poison Centers Will Jeopardize Services

ALEXANDRIA, VA – About 80 leaders from America's poison centers recently visited Capitol Hill to deliver a strong message about the importance of the nation's poison center network and to urge lawmakers to support federal funding for the system, according to Marsha Ford, MD, FACMT, FACEP, president of the American Association of Poison Control Centers.

Since 2011, federal funding to America's 57 poison centers has been cut by 36 percent, jeopardizing the effectiveness of the national program. Further cuts will make it difficult for some poison centers to continue providing lifesaving services upon which the American public and health care providers rely.

"Local poison centers provide confidential health care services 24 hours a day, seven days a week at no direct cost to the people who call," Ford said. "Poison centers save countless lives and millions of taxpayer dollars every year. Our message to Congress is clear – Congressional support and funding for the national poison center program are critical to ensuring the American public has access to poison center services."

During their Feb. 26, 2012, meetings with U.S. Senators, Representatives and key staff, poison center leaders highlighted the vital role of poison centers in the nation's public health and health care system:

1. **Poison centers save lives.** Highly trained nurses, pharmacists and doctors at America's local poison centers field about 3.6 million calls every year, including 2.3 million calls about exposures to poisons and adverse reactions to prescription drugs.
2. **Poison centers save millions of dollars in unnecessary health care spending.** About 90 percent of the public who call with poison emergencies are treated at home. Poison center expertise keeps the vast majority of callers out of hospitals and decreases the length of hospital stays – saving an estimated \$1.19 billion in medical costs every year.
3. **Local poison centers are needed in the nation's public health system.** Poison centers are often the first to identify emerging public health threats. In the past few years, U.S. poison

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centers were the first to raise the alarm about synthetic drugs; they identified health issues associated with energy drinks and packets of highly concentrated laundry detergent; and they tracked the incidence of numerous food-borne illnesses.

The total cost to support the national poison center system is about \$136 million per year. The federal government currently allocates \$18.8 million in total annual funding for the poison center program, less 8 percent for federal program administration – for a total of \$17.1 million.

“The return on investment for the federal government is substantial,” said Debbie Carr, MEd, executive director of the American Association of Poison Control Centers. “Federal funding covers 13 percent of the cost to operate poison centers, yet Medicare and Medicaid combined realize 57 percent of the \$1.19 billion in yearly medical cost savings. Since every dollar invested yields additional savings, federal cuts to poison center funding will cost taxpayers more in the long run. As Congress and the American people look for ways to reduce health care costs, it makes sense to invest in the poison center system.”

For more information, contact Loreeta Canton, director of public relations and member services for the American Association of Poison Control Centers, at 703.894.1858 or canton@aapcc.org or visit www.aapcc.org.

About the American Association of Poison Control Centers:

The AAPCC supports the nation’s 57 poison centers in their efforts to treat and prevent drug, consumer product, animal, environmental and food poisoning. Members staff the Poison Help hotline at 1-800-222-1222 that provides free, confidential, expert medical advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year from toxicology specialists, including nurses, pharmacists, physicians and poison information providers. In addition, the AAPCC maintains the only poison information and surveillance database in the United States, providing real-time monitoring of unusual poisoning patterns, chemical exposures and other emerging public health hazards. The AAPCC partners with federal agencies such as EPA, HRSA and the CDC, as well as private industry.

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