



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

RSA Tower 201 Monroe Street, Suite 914 Montgomery, AL 36104

Phone 334-206-5300 Fax 334-206-5534

[www.adph.org](http://www.adph.org)

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## **Arthritis Prevention and Treatment Coalition to meet Sept. 17**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

CONTACT: Jack Hataway, M.D.  
Linda Austin  
334-206-5300

Arthritis affects an estimated one million Alabamians. Arthritis is not a single disease that affects all individuals in the same manner. It includes more than 100 diseases and conditions.

Based on the assumption that Alabama's costs follow the same patterns as seen nationally in 1999, arthritis is also a costly disease. For Alabamians with arthritis, the statewide estimate exceeds \$565 million a year in direct costs for hospital stays, physicians, drug regimens and joint replacements.

The Alabama Arthritis Prevention and Treatment Coalition will hold its fourth meeting Sept. 17 in Montgomery. The statewide coalition was formed in February 2000 after Alabama was awarded arthritis planning funds in 1999 to increase efforts to reduce the occurrence of arthritis and its accompanying disability.

The Alabama Department of Public Health; the Arthritis Foundation, Alabama Chapter; and the University of Alabama at Birmingham are partners in the grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The mission of the coalition is to coordinate the efforts of individuals, groups, agencies and facilities to develop and recommend strategies that would enhance the objectives of the grant and Healthy People 2010.

The coalition has developed a State of Alabama Arthritis Plan to meet the measured needs of persons at risk for, or already having, arthritis and the needs of general health care providers engaged in arthritis prevention and treatment. Coalition efforts are expected to lead to better informed citizens who will know how to recognize early symptoms of arthritis, seek proper medical treatment, and pursue positive self-management techniques.

This plan focuses on prevention education activities targeted toward maintaining appropriate weight, avoiding occupational or sports-related injuries, and increasing physical activity. Initial steps toward establishing self-management programs have been established.

For more information about the coalition meeting or on arthritis, please contact Linda Austin, R.N., Arthritis Prevention Branch director, Alabama Department of Public Health, (334) 206-5603, or Sandi Falkenhagen, vice president for health promotion, Arthritis Foundation, Alabama Chapter, 300 Vestavia Parkway, Suite 3500, Birmingham, Ala. 35216, 205/979 5700.

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