State to provide funds for fight against AIDS

By The Associated Press

The state will provide $23.3 million to hospitals and other groups to help in the fight against AIDS, officials said Thursday.

"The majority of the money, about $20 million, will go to hospitals in New Orleans, Shreveport, Alexandria, Baton Rouge, Lafayette and Houma," said Patrick Grusenmeyer, director of the Department of Health and Hospital's HIV Program Office.

The rest of the money will be devoted to early intervention programs and continuing AIDS research at Tulane University and LSU, he said.

Grusenmeyer's comments came during the first meeting of the Louisiana Commission on HIV and AIDS.

He said the Medical Center of Louisiana at New Orleans will receive about $12.5 million for HIV outpatient care, training and counseling services. "It handles the largest volume of patients," Grusenmeyer explained.

Ted Wisniewski, medical director for the HIV Program Office, said Louisiana ranks ninth among states in the number of AIDS cases reported.

As of June 1, there were 3,413 reported AIDS cases in Louisiana, he said.

Almost two-thirds of those people, 2,196, have died, officials said.

An estimated 26,000 people are projected to be infected with the virus, he said.

In 1985, Wisniewski said 29 percent of the reported cases were outside the metropolitan New Orleans area. In 1990, 44 percent of the cases were in rural areas, he said.

In addition, about 25 percent of the cases reported involved adolescents, he said.

Grusenmeyer said he believes hospital caseloads will increase in coming years.

"I don't think we're going to see a plateau anytime soon," he said. "Because of the disease's long latency period, we're going to see more and more demand for care."

Billie Catwallader, a DHH spokeswoman, said the 25-member commission will try to develop a consensus approach to solving problems related to AIDS.

She said one of their main goals will be to educate the public and to address the problem of long-term financing for AIDS care.