

leaving males, for females, or for both, compared to new counterparts who stayed in high school.

Isolating and identifying some of the differences between school leavers and other young adults in Tennessee will aid in profiling these important groups, in assessing differences in their need for alcohol or drug treatment and prevention services, and in planning, developing, and evaluating appropriate, cost-effective programs to meet those needs.

## **Findings**

### Sociodemographic

High school leavers are comparable with high school graduates in terms of gender, race, and marital status. Leavers completed an average of 9.8 years of schooling, about 4 years less than graduates. Income and employment are the major sociodemographic differences between the groups. With an average income of \$18,535, school leavers are more likely to be poor compared to graduates who have an average income of \$31,442. Fewer leavers were employed in the past year and more were employed only part-time.

### Health status and access to care

The health status of high school leavers is generally poorer than that of graduates. Nineteen percent of the leavers report their health as fair or poor while 7% of the graduates report the same. At the same time, school leavers have less access to health services and less financial resources, whether insurance or personal finances, to pay for health care. As a consequence, a high percentage of school leavers (47%) report having foregone needed medical care. Because high school leavers lack a regular care provider, they are more likely to use emergency room services when they do need care, which increases costs. School leavers have significantly higher rates of hypertension, diabetes, cancer, gastrointestinal problems, and clinically diagnosed alcohol and other drug problems. More leavers report being severely stressed, and more of this group have recently (within the last 30 days) experienced anxiety or depression.

### Tobacco use

More school leavers have used cigarettes at some time in their lives than stayers, 65% and 54% respectively. One-half of the school leavers who have ever smoked continue to use cigarettes as compared to a third of the graduates. And, leavers smoke on average 5 more cigarettes a day than do the stayers.