

The meeting in Yakutsk openly discussed the alarming demographic situation. The overall death rate among the Northern ethnic groups is 1.7 times higher than the rate for the total population of the region; 70 per cent of the native Northerners die before the age of 60.

The major components in producing the mortality rate are accidents, poisoning, and trauma, which are in most cases related to the consumption of alcohol. In Kamchatka, for instance, total mortality and infant mortality in the population was reduced successfully in 1986, the first time in many years, by slightly reducing the consumption of spirits. But there was no subsequent improvement in these figures. In the opinion of Chief Physician A. Chuiko, the obstacle in this case has been the wave of bootleg distilling, which has also broken out in Kamchatka.

#### A SWIMMING POOL INSTEAD OF TABLETS

Readers of Sovetskaya Rossiya who have been attentively following the progress of the medical campaign in Chita Oblast have quite properly asked: why do you identify public health problems solely with hospitals, polyclinics, and medicines? Why are swimming pools and gymnasiums in our country the monopoly of athletes?

This question automatically called to mind our visit to enterprises of the Yakutalmaz Industrial Association [obedinenie] in the city of Mirnyi. V. Piskunov, the association's general manager, showed us, with a certain measure of pride, residential housing that had everything - a laundry room, showers, and even saunas with swimming pools. But, if instead of asking the local doctors questions about diseases, you ask about health-improvement efforts, they only shrug their shoulders.