

# PREVENTION OF OPIOID & PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE IN THE U.S.

Prescription drugs—including opioid pain relievers, stimulants, and depressants—are the second most abused category of drugs after marijuana,<sup>1</sup> and abuse of prescription drugs is the fastest growing drug problem in the U.S.<sup>2</sup> Non-medical use of prescription drugs can be as dangerous as use of other illegal drugs, and can lead to addiction, psychosis, heart problems, and even death, in addition to other serious consequences.<sup>3</sup>

## What are opioids?

Opioids are drugs that bind to specific receptors in the brain, spinal cord, and gastrointestinal tract to minimize the body's perception of pain. Opioids include illegal drugs such as heroin, as well as prescription medications used to treat pain such as morphine, codeine, methadone, oxycodone, hydrocodone, fentanyl, hydromorphone, and buprenorphine.<sup>4</sup>

LEARN MORE TO BE THE ONE WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

## What Communities Can Do



### Parents

Get involved in your child's day-to-day activities and discuss the risks of misusing or abusing prescription drugs. By being involved early and consistently, you can help prevent problems before they occur.<sup>5</sup> Parents should also securely store prescription drugs and dispose of unused supplies.



### Health Care Providers

- Screen for prescription drug abuse or misuse during routine medical visits.<sup>6</sup>
- Check if your state has a **Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP)** by visiting the website of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program Training and Technical Assistance Center (<http://www.pdmpassist.org>). If your state has a PDMP, use it to track prescriptions and identify patients who may be “doctor shopping” to obtain multiple or repeated prescription medications.<sup>7</sup>

- Use the National Institute on Drug Abuse report titled **Prescription Drugs Abuse** to identify signs of prescription drug abuse or dependence, and to talk with patients about the negative effects of misusing prescription drugs. The report is available at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/director>.<sup>8</sup>
- Stay up to date on evidence-based practices for the use of opioid analgesics to manage pain, as well as steps to prevent and manage opioid overdose (e.g., through a Continuing Medical Education course available free-of-charge at <http://www.OpioidPrescribing.com>).<sup>9</sup>



### Educators

Improve the learning environment by addressing students' aggressive behaviors and poor concentration, which are risks associated with the eventual onset of drug abuse and related problems.<sup>10</sup>



## Workplaces<sup>11</sup>

Drug-free workplace programs can help employers create cost-effective, safe, and healthy workplaces. Studies have indicated that successful drug-free workplace programs generally have at least five key components:<sup>12</sup>

- A written policy;
- Employee education;
- Supervisor training;
- An employee assistance program (EAP); and
- Drug testing.

Before considering these five components, employers should examine the needs of their organizations and take steps to ensure that the programs they design will work well in their workplaces.



## Everyone

Many signs may indicate that someone is abusing prescription drugs, and could also point to other problems. Signs to look for include:<sup>13</sup>

- Evidence of drug paraphernalia or inhalant products;
- Changes in friends, the use of secretive language, increased secrecy about possessions or activities, negative changes in school or job performance;
- Excessive mood swings or hostility;
- Appearing to be high or sedated; and an
- Increase in borrowing money.

## Helpful Resources

- **SAMHSA's Treatment Locator**, available at <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>, is a searchable directory of drug and alcohol treatment programs. The Treatment Locator shows the location of facilities around the country that treat drug abuse and alcohol problems.
- The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy's (ONDCP's) National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign provides materials directed toward teens through its "**Above the Influence**" campaign. More information is available at <http://www.abovetheinfluence.com>.
- The "**NIDA for Teens**" website from NIDA, available at <http://teens.drugabuse.gov>, offers facts for teens about prescription drug abuse and illicit drug use. **NIDA DrugFacts**, available at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/finder/t/160/DrugFacts> also provides updated information on the health effects of specific drugs, including prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- SAMHSA's Road to Recovery webcast, "**Ignoring Instructions: The Importance of Using Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medications Properly**," gives an overview of prescription drug abuse and discusses people who are at risk, available at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be abusing or addicted to prescription or illicit drugs, help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year through SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD). The Helpline provides free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish.

## Sources

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