



Prescription Drug Community Action Kit

Advocating for Change

As a leader in your community, you are a powerful force for change. You may identify a number of areas where you and other advocates can help address prescription drug abuse at the local, state and national levels.

States and communities have passed laws or changed regulations to address various aspects of the prescription drug overdose problem. These include:

- Creating and improving Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs
- Reducing inappropriate prescribing
- Improving prescriber training
- Drug take-back and medication disposal
- Efforts to increase access to naloxone
- Expanding access to substance abuse treatment

These laws and regulations are a good first step. Advocacy can take them to the next level.

STATE PRESCRIPTION DRUG MONITORING PROGRAMS (PDMPs)

PDMPs are state operated databases that collect prescription information from pharmacies and dispensers of controlled substances. The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program Center of Excellence at Brandeis University (COE) identifies recommended best practices. A number of recommended improvements require changes in laws or regulations. Some of these include:

- Prescription data can be accessed by a variety of professionals and state agencies including:
 - Prescribers and dispensers
 - Law enforcement, coroners or medical examiners and licensing boards with probable cause or active investigation
 - State insurance programs such as Medicaid, etc.
- The PDMP makes it easy for prescribers to register to use the system and allows dispenser and prescriber delegates
- Prescription data is real time or collected from pharmacies within 24 hours
- State PDMP shares data with other states
- PDMP proactively alerts the following user groups: prescribers, dispensers, law enforcement and licensing boards

- Prescription data is easy for prescribers to access and use in clinical practice

You can view the status of your state Prescription Monitoring Program at the **National Alliance of Model State Drug Laws**.

ACCESS TO NALOXONE AND GOOD SAMARITAN LAWS

Opioid overdose can be reversed with the timely use of naloxone. However, access to naloxone and other emergency treatment is often limited by laws and regulations that pre-date the overdose epidemic. A number of states have recently changed those laws to increase access to emergency care and treatment for opiate overdose. Typically, laws will address two areas:

- Allow prescribers to prescribe naloxone to third parties
- Ensure prescribers, first responders and community members who use naloxone to reverse an overdose do not incur legal recourse
- Good Samaritan laws that encourage those who witness an overdose to calling 911 without fear of arrest or other negative legal consequences

You can search for your state's law at the **Network for Public Health Law** website.

INAPPROPRIATE PRESCRIBING

In addition to community efforts to educate prescribers about safer opioid prescribing practices, many states are taking action. Some of these include:

- Pain clinic regulations
- State medical boards and licensing agencies provide rules or guidance to all prescribers on responsible prescribing of opioid pain relievers
- Requirements for additional education regarding responsible prescribing of controlled substances, pain management, screening for substance use disorders and state prescription monitoring program. A number of states are requiring certain prescribers, such as pain management professionals, to obtain mandatory education
- Some states are requiring prescribers to register or use the state PDMP

EXPANSION OF ACCESS TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT AND MEDICATION-ASSISTED TREATMENT

Many community substance treatment programs have waiting lists or cannot serve everyone who wants and needs treatment. According to SAMHSA, in 2013 more than 22.7 million people ages 12 or older needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol problem, but only 2.5 million received treatment. Advocacy increases visibility. Therefore, it can help increase access to treatment. Advocacy can lead to:

- Increased funding for state substance abuse treatment
- Development of programs that purchase opioid treatment medications, such as methadone or buprenorphine for low-income or uninsured individuals
- Expansion of Medicaid in states that did not expand under the Affordable Care Act
- Utilization or expansion of drug courts



TIPS FOR ADVOCACY

Why get involved in legislative advocacy? Because you have a unique role to play and can make a difference.

Grassroots advocacy is when ordinary people, not professional lobbyists, get together to advocate on behalf of an issue. You are at the grassroots level, which makes you very powerful. You live in the state; you are personally impacted by its lack of strong laws to address the prescription drug epidemic. By speaking to the impact the law will have on you and your community, you can weave a powerful, personal and impactful story. Finally, you vote and ultimately decide whether your lawmakers return to office. Because of this, legislators place great weight on the views of their constituents.

A Congressional Management Foundation survey found that:

- 96% of Congressional staff say constituent visits have some or a lot of influence on an undecided member
- 87% said town hall meetings, and 80% said letters to the editor have some or a lot of influence
- Constituents who personally make an effort to communicate with their legislators are more influential than lobbyists and news editors
- Personalized contact makes a difference, with 88% of staffers saying personalized emails make an impact

There are many different ways you can get involved in advocacy efforts to support the passage of legislation in your state – from simple, low time commitment activities to more time consuming, resource intensive activities.

You could:

- Write letters or emails to your elected officials
- Call the office of your elected official and sharing your views on an issue with staff
- Mention your legislators in letters to the editor or op-eds. Legislative staff look for mentions of their boss's name (both good and bad) in local newspapers.

If you decide to go to a meeting with your legislator or his or her staff, there are several easy things you can do to ensure you have the greatest impact:

- Do your research into the legislative climate
- Have a concise message, tailored to each office
- Have a clear ask – what are you seeking from the legislator?
- Use facts and statistics
- Tell your personal story and how this request will impact you
- Leave behind a one-page summary of your requests and the reasoning behind them
- Send a thank you note
- Follow up at appropriate times

The National Safety Council is ready to help you make an impact in many ways. Two of the biggest ways NSC can help you maximize your impact are through our advocacy alerts and key contact program.

You can sign up for advocacy alerts at <http://www.nsc.org/alerts>. By signing up for advocacy alerts, NSC will reach out to you at key points in the legislative cycle when your outreach to lawmakers will make the biggest difference. You can sign up to receive alerts in those areas that interest you most, including prescription drugs, distracted driving, teen driving and workplace safety. Please sign up for alerts today.

You can also help make a difference by participating in the Council's key contact program. Often times convincing a key lawmaker to support a piece of legislation can make the difference between a bill being stuck in committee or being signed into law. NSC has a key contact **program survey** to help identify supporters' relationships with elected officials and their willingness to engage these lawmakers at key points in the legislative process. Please help advocate for safety by completing the survey today.

No matter what level of experience you have with advocacy, your efforts can make a difference. All it takes is the willingness to commit time and effort, and your efforts can save lives.

