

take
CARE
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What Can We Do

About Prescription
Drug Abuse
in West Virginia?



A Guide for Community Discussions



Welcome to the Forum!



County Prevention Partnerships throughout West Virginia are joining with other local groups to sponsor community forums about prescription drug abuse and what we can do about it.

The purpose of the forum is to work together to:

- Better understand the issue;
- Consider the benefits and drawbacks of different approaches to the issue;
- Identify actions that will be supported throughout our communities with time, energy, and resources;
- Examine the roles of government, schools, businesses, civic and religious groups, and individuals; and
- Identify next steps for discussion and action.

The forums are intended as a starting point that will lead to further discussions and actions to address this serious problem within our communities and across the state.

About the Issue Guide:

This issue guide was based on interviews with hundreds of West Virginians from different backgrounds as well as research about prescription drug abuse in the state. The potential actions represent the diverse views of our state's residents and not necessarily those of the project co-sponsors.

About the Forum Co-Sponsors:

County Prevention Partnerships exist in most of West Virginia's 55 counties, and they are the front line of the state's substance abuse prevention system. For local contact information, visit www.prevNET.org/countypartnerships or call 304-766-6301.

The **West Virginia Prevention Resource Center** provides support for community prevention efforts through information dissemination, networking and collaboration, facilitated learning and training, and evaluation. The WVPRC is primarily funded through federal Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Funds administered by the WVDHHR's Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities. For more information, contact your local Community Development Specialist. To find that person's contact information visit www.prevNET.org or call the WV Prevention Resource Center at 304-766-6301.

The **West Virginia Center for Civic Life** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to involve West Virginians in public discussions about issues that affect the quality of life in the state. For more information, contact Betty Knighton at 304-344-3430, mail@wvcivicliflife.org. Web site: www.wvcivicliflife.org.

Funding for the project was provided by the West Virginia Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant, which is administered by the WV Division of Criminal Justice Services. The project's pilot initiative in Fayette County was funded by a grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation.

What Can We Do

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INTRODUCTION

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During the past decade, the abuse of prescription drugs in West Virginia has increased among adults and youth, harming individuals, families and communities. Prescription drug abuse threatens the health, safety, family structures and economy of our state.



How can we prevent prescription drug abuse?

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Many people in West Virginia feel that the key to discouraging prescription drug abuse is working together to build healthy communities. They believe that when communities work together to understand the factors that contribute to prescription drug abuse and identify strategies to address those factors that the problem will decrease.



How can we support enforcement of laws and regulations?

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Many people in West Virginia feel that a key to reducing prescription drug abuse is to support strong regulations and laws that discourage prescription drug abuse and keep communities safe. They believe that law enforcement is an effective way to stop prescription drug abuse in our communities.



How can we support early intervention, treatment, and recovery?

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Many people in West Virginia believe that access to early intervention, treatment, and recovery services are effective ways to deal with prescription drug abuse. They believe that through these services, those who are struggling with prescription drug abuse can recover and succeed in building healthy, productive lives.

Making It Happen

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What can we do to reduce prescription drug abuse in West Virginia?

Introduction



“West Virginia is a wonderful place to live and work. Unfortunately, we are not immune from the problem of substance abuse,” Governor Joe Manchin wrote in *The Governor’s Strategic Plan to Address Substance Abuse in West Virginia*. “We are experiencing alarming trends in prescription drug abuse, the use of illicit substances, and underage drinking and tobacco use.”

Virtually everyone is touched by substance abuse, directly or indirectly. The social and financial consequences can be devastating to the individual, but the trouble doesn’t stop there. The impact of substance abuse, including prescription drug abuse, ripples throughout communities and is linked to a host of social ills.

For example:

- According to statewide statistics gathered by the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, over half of domestic violence cases involve substance abuse either as a contributing factor (not a cause) of the violence or as a coping mechanism for victims.
- Among West Virginia’s regional jail inmates, 45 percent of the crimes committed were directly or indirectly attributable to alcohol, and 19 percent were attributable to drugs.¹
- More than 2,500 hospitalizations each year in West Virginia are caused primarily by alcohol or drug-related conditions, such as abuse, dependence, or poisoning.²
- Nationally, three-quarters of illicit drug users are employed in the workplace, and their drug use presents potential dangers to themselves and others, as well as reduced productivity and increased absenteeism.³
- The total cost to West Virginia for substance abuse was \$1.86 billion in 2006, or more than \$1,000 for every state resident. This includes \$470 million in direct costs, such as treatment, prisons, law enforcement and court costs.⁴

“These problems affect us all and stand as a barrier to our state reaching its full potential, rob us of our financial capital, and leaves behind a wake of human suffering and personal tragedy,” Governor Manchin said. “It is time we took seriously the business of reducing substance abuse. We cannot afford not to.”



The WV Partnership to Promote Community Well-Being and the WV Prevention Resource Center have developed a Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Social Marketing Campaign, which includes the development of public service announcements for TV, radio, newspapers and billboards. The materials are available for local use and can be downloaded at www.takecarewv.org.

Prescription Drug Abuse “Wreaking Havoc”

The fastest growing substance abuse problem today is prescription drug abuse. According to Carl R. “Rolly” Sullivan, M.D., Medical Director of addiction services at West Virginia University, “Prescription drug abuse in West Virginia is a silent epidemic that is wreaking havoc on communities throughout the state.”⁵

Startling evidence of the epidemic is the spike in unintentional poisoning deaths of more than 500 percent in West Virginia between 1999 and 2004, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Another study showed that deaths from unintentional drug overdoses increased from less than 50 per year to about 400 per year in between 1999 and 2007. (See Figure 1).

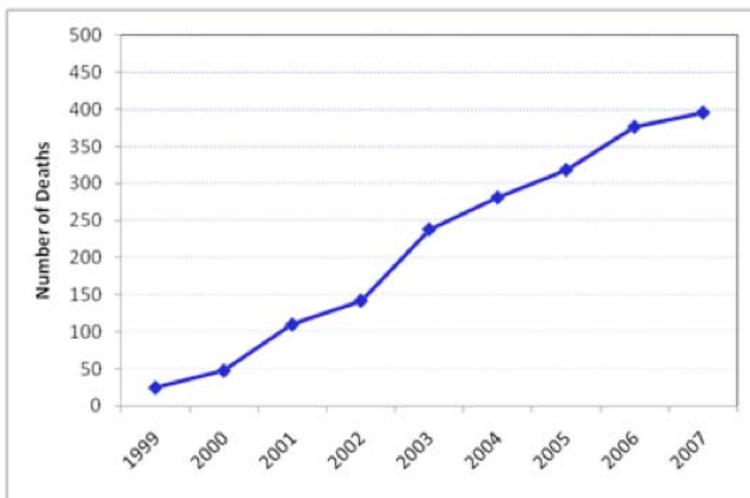
West Virginia’s death rate from unintentional overdose is:

- the highest in the region and among the highest in the nation.
- twice as high for men than women.
- concentrated among people ages 18 to 54.
- higher in southern counties than in northern counties.

(See Figure 2.)⁶

West Virginia led the nation in prescriptions filled or refilled per capita in 2008—18.7 versus 12 nationally.⁷ Many suggest that our state’s older population, higher incidence of chronic conditions, and work-related injuries may contribute to the higher rate. The abundance of pharmaceuticals may indicate a situation in which prescription drugs can be taken incorrectly, shared, or sold.

Figure 1



Source: WV Prevention Resource Center with vital statistics data obtained from the WV Health Statistics Center by special request.

“How do we make another see the pain and torment of drug addiction and abuse? Can anyone hear my cry? My daughter is worth saving. She can still change no matter the opinions of the critics on the sidelines.”

– Nicole Slaughter, Fayette County mother

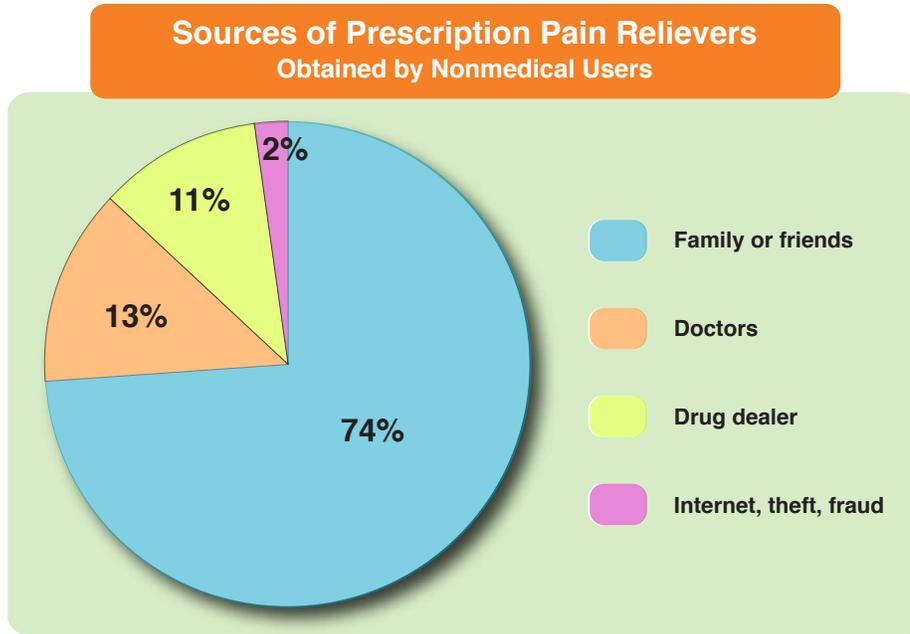
“They come from all education levels. We have all the way from a high school dropout to someone with a master’s degree who is part of our recovery ministry, and people from all classes, too, low income to great salaries. It really runs the gamut.”

– Pastor Lindsay Thorp, Wayne County¹

“Youth that we have spoken with are getting prescription drugs from their parents’ medicine cabinet without their parents’ knowledge. We encourage parents and grandparents and community members in general to lock and count their medications.”

– Julia Charvat, Ohio County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition

Figure 3



Source: National Survey on Drug Use and Health www.oas.samhsa.gov.

quarters of nonmedical prescription drug users in West Virginia got the drugs from relatives or friends for free (64 percent), in exchange for money (7.6 percent), or without asking (2.4 percent).⁸

“The problem is (family and friends) aren’t sharing (prescription drugs) because they’re trying to be devious,” said Dr. Michael O’Neil, Director of the Center of Excellence for the Prevention of Drug Diversion and Substance Abuse at the University of Charleston School of Pharmacy. “They’re just trying to be helpful. We really need to educate people about the sharing culture because it promotes inappropriate use of drugs, even if the intent is not for abuse or recreation. It can be the first step for people getting into trouble.”⁹

“Being helpful” may inadvertently cause someone to share a prescription drug with a relative or friend who’s allergic to it. Or the shared prescription drug may cause a harmful interaction with another drug the person is taking. Used in combination with alcohol or over-the-counter drugs, the potential dangers of prescription drug abuse rise sharply. Other risks associated with prescription drug abuse include addiction, overdose, respiratory distress, cardiovascular complications, seizures and death.¹⁰

Stemming the Prescription Drug Abuse Epidemic

People abuse prescription drugs for a variety of reasons, and there also may be many factors in a community that contribute to the problem. A multi-faceted approach is needed to effectively address the issue. For example, information and education can go a long way in preventing the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs. Strong laws and their enforcement can provide consequences for people to learn from and can help keep communities safe. Early intervention, treatment and recovery programs can help people who are already abusing prescription drugs.

Public policies can help support community action. The West Virginia Legislature passed several new laws in March 2010 aimed at reducing prescription drug abuse, including mandating the use of tamper-resistant prescription pads. Another new law requires pharmacies to provide their pharmacists access to West Virginia's online prescription drug database. This enables pharmacists to identify patients who are trying to fill prescriptions from different doctors for the same drug, a common practice for prescription drug abusers. A third law prohibits people from providing false information to obtain prescriptions for controlled substances.

What Can We Do?

In this forum, we'll discuss several key questions about what can be done:

- **How can we prevent prescription drug abuse?**
- **How can we support enforcement of laws and regulations?**
- **How can we support early intervention, treatment, and recovery?**

Many of us will see at least some value in each of these approaches. The challenge lies in coming to agreement on priorities and being willing to act on them. To do so, we need to grapple with these questions:

- What factors in our community contribute to the prescription drug abuse problem?
- What actions are likely to have the greatest impact?
- What actions will we support with our time, energy, and resources?
- If we can't do everything at once, where should we start?
- What should we expect from government, from our schools and communities, from business leaders and from ourselves?

This forum is the beginning of this important conversation. We hope it leads to further discussions, involving wider circles of people who care about the issue and are willing to work together to take actions to address the problem of prescription drug abuse in West Virginia.

How can we prevent prescription drug abuse?

When communities work together they can create an environments that discourage prescription drug abuse and its consequences. From this perspective, there is an important role for everyone in the community. Working to prevent prescription drug abuse in the first place is the simplest and most cost-effective solution to the problem.



What Could We Do?

- **Identify factors that contribute to the prescription drug abuse problem in your community.** In addition to studying data available from state and federal agencies, communities can undertake their own “fact-finding” efforts. These could include local surveys, interviews and discussion groups, as well as school projects that involve youth in the issue.
- **Develop a community awareness campaign.** Prescription drug abuse is a problem that cannot be blamed solely on will power. A better public understanding of the causes of the problem can encourage friends, neighbors and families to deal with this difficult issue. Community organizations can develop and distribute accurate information about the problem, what is contributing to it, and what can be done about it.
- **Participate in the statewide “Take Care” campaign.** The WV Partnership to Promote Community Well-Being and the WV Prevention Resource Center have developed a *Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Social Marketing Campaign*, which includes the development of messages for TV, radio, newspapers and billboards. (The materials are available for local use and can be downloaded at www.takecarewv.org.)
- **Increase resources for community prevention efforts.** Business, civic and religious groups can work together to raise money and other resources (meeting space, food, volunteer hours) for programs that help communities.
- **Involve everyone in prevention.** Everyone can take individual responsibility for the problem and commit to learning more about the prescription drug abuse problem in our communities and state. We can learn about safe practices for using, storing, and disposing of prescription drugs and share that information with others. We can also be involved in the work of our county prevention partnership (www.prevNET.org).



What challenges do we face?

- Some people do not realize sharing prescription drugs with family and friends is illegal. Some do not realize that prescription drugs should not be dispensed or consumed without a written prescription from a medical practitioner.
- Many people are unaware of proper strategies for monitoring, storing, and disposing of prescription drugs.

"I think we need – as a society, not necessarily just law enforcement – to look at the education and prevention side of this problem. That will take care of a large segment of (prescription drug) abusers."

– West Virginia State Police spokesman
Sgt. Michael Baylous¹¹

Would you support this approach even if . . .

- You would have to help raise funds for community prevention efforts?
- You would have to spend more time thinking and learning about prescription drug abuse?

Notes: _____

How can we support the enforcement of laws and regulations?

Many people feel that strong, effective law enforcement is the key to protecting residents and discouraging prescription drug abuse. The enforcement of existing laws about drug abuse is difficult without effective community partnerships and support. Community residents must be committed to doing what is necessary to support, respect and reinforce rules that have been designed to create drug-free homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.



What Could We Do?

- **Provide education about current laws and the WV prescription database.** Health care providers, law enforcement officers and prosecutors need training on new state laws aimed at curbing prescription drug abuse. These include giving pharmacists access to West Virginia's online prescription drug database to identify people who are trying to get around the system.
- **Secure funding to increase law enforcement.** Having additional police officers trained in drug diversion investigation strategies will make local enforcement efforts more effective. Community organizations can work together to apply for state and federal funds for increasing law enforcement personnel. Community fundraisers can help to purchase additional equipment and training for officers.
- **Institute drug testing policies.** Local employers could require drug screening of employees. Schools could institute a random drug testing policy for high school students and employees.
- **Support the expansion of drug courts.** Drug courts provide an alternative to incarceration for non-violent drug offenders, requiring treatment, drug monitoring, and regular appearances before a judge. In juvenile drug courts, parents or guardians of youthful offenders also participate in family counseling sessions and meetings with their child's probation officer.
- **Organize a neighborhood watch.** When an entire neighborhood participates in an organized neighborhood watch program, the impact on neighborhood safety can be significant. Law enforcement officials can work with interested neighborhoods to provide the necessary guidance and training to plan and implement an effective program.



What challenges do we face?

- Sharing of prescription drugs between family and friends is difficult to detect through regulations and law enforcement.
- Many people are concerned about the invasion of personal privacy involved in drug testing.

"I am out there every day, seeing patients and trying to do good, empathetic, appropriate care, and at the same time not allowing (prescription) fraud and abuse to occur."

- Dr. Ron Stollings, a physician and state senator from Boone County who pushed for new laws to reduce prescription drug abuse

Would you support this approach even if . . .

- More of your tax dollars went toward the cost of jailing prescription drug abusers?
- You would have to submit to drug testing?

Notes: _____

How can we support early intervention, treatment and recovery?

The goal of early intervention, treatment and recovery is to help people return to a productive place in their family, workplace and community. Research shows that many people who have access to good programs can stop using drugs, end criminal activity, and improve the quality of their lives overall. Access to affordable, high-quality treatment and recovery programs is key to providing help to addicts who need it.



What Could We Do?

- **Establish a substance abuse early intervention program for youth and their families.** Many regions of West Virginia lack early intervention programs. Communities can work with schools, courts, and other social services to establish referral programs and support services to help youth and families who are in the early stages of prescription drug abuse.
- **Support additional early intervention, treatment, and recovery options in underserved areas.** When people can receive treatment and recovery close to family and community support, they are often more likely to succeed. Community organizations and county officials can work together to explore successful treatment programs and secure the funding to develop them. Community organizations and religious groups can offer space at an affordable cost for 12-step program meetings.
- **Develop ongoing support for recovery through group homes.** Completing a treatment program is only the first step on the road to recovery for those with drug abuse problems. They need ongoing support after they complete local outpatient treatment programs or when they return from residential programs. Local officials, community organizations, and individuals can work together to modify community housing into effective group recovery homes.
- **Develop circles of support in the community.** People in need of services for prescription drug abuse often have a difficult time navigating the service system. Community mentors and advocates can help these individuals make the necessary phone calls, track down important information and cut through the red tape. They can provide moral support throughout and following the process, which can include helping the individual make important lifestyle changes.



- **Eliminate barriers to services.** Many people who need treatment slip through the cracks because of the restrictive policies of state and federal programs and private insurers. State legislators, with the support of their constituents, can examine the most common reasons why treatment is not readily accessible, and advocate for changes to eliminate these barriers.

“During that six months, I was able to put my life back in order step by step. I attended an intensive outpatient program for 12 weeks, and I also attended 90 Narcotics Anonymous/Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in 90 days.”

- Marion County mother and college student

What challenges do we face?

- Getting community support for early intervention, treatment, and recovery services is sometimes difficult. Some people fear that the presence of a treatment facility or recovery homes in their neighborhood will attract crime and endanger their children.
- While many communities are in need of treatment and recovery centers, long-term plans for creating programs won’t help people who need services now.

Would you support this approach even if . . .

- A treatment center or recovery program were established near where you live?
- Your children would be attending school with youth in early intervention, treatment, or recovery programs?

Notes: _____

In this forum, we have explored different approaches for dealing with drug abuse in West Virginia. Though the approaches overlap in some respects, they suggest different priorities for action that would bring different benefits and trade-offs. Now it's time to reflect on your experience in the forum.

Individually...

What new information or insights did you gain?

How did your own thinking about the issue change?

How did your thinking about other people's views change?

As a group...

What actions are we most willing to support, and why?

What actions are we least willing to support, and why?

What trade-offs are we most willing to accept?

What tough choices do we still need to grapple with?

Moving to Action



Most people who participate in forums want to do more than talk about the problem; they also want to consider actions that will improve the situation. What are the opportunities for action that emerged from this forum?

What are the possibilities?

What can we each do personally to address our county's prescription drug abuse problem?

What can our schools and communities do about the issue?

What policies – local, state or national – could be changed to prevent prescription drug abuse and improve treatment options?

How else can we use what we learned today?

Where should we start?

What actions are most likely to have the greatest impact?

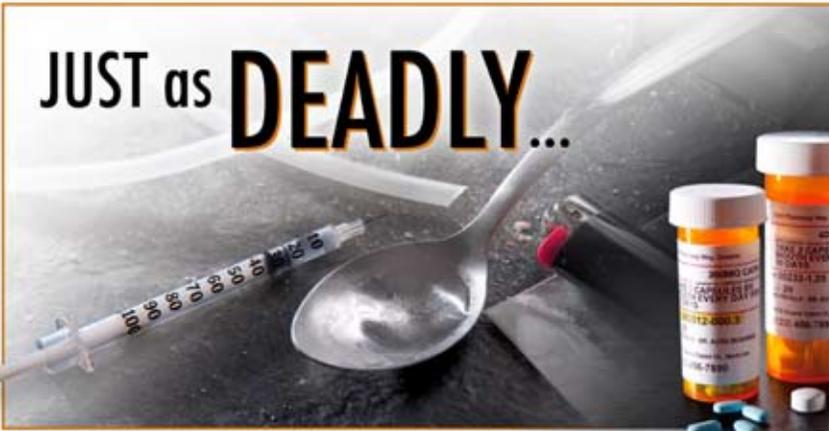
What actions are most likely to be supported with time, energy, and resources?

Who needs to be involved?

What will be our next steps?

Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Social Marketing Campaign

The WV Partnership to Promote Community Well-Being and the WV Prevention Resource Center have developed a series of messages for television, radio, newspapers, and billboards, including the ones below.



JUST as DEADLY...

Everyone knows **DRUGS** are **DEADLY**, right?

But did you know that sharing prescription drugs is deadly too?

In 2006, over 93% of West Virginia's fatal drug overdoses involved prescription pain medication.¹

Only take prescription drugs as advised by your doctor.
Please don't share prescription drugs.

Funded by the Governor's Drug Free WV Grants

West Virginia **PARTNERSHIP**
To Promote Community Well-Being

Division of **CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES**

take **CARE**

Find out more at: takecarewv.org

¹Source: Hall et al. Journal of the American Medical Association, 2008



JUST as ILLEGAL...

Everyone knows **DRUGS** are **ILLEGAL**, right?

But did you know that sharing prescription drugs is illegal too?

In West Virginia, over 73% of non-medical users of pain relievers reported getting the most recent used drug from a friend or relative.¹

Only take prescription drugs as advised by your doctor.
Please don't share prescription drugs.

Funded by the Governor's Drug Free WV Grants

West Virginia **PARTNERSHIP**
To Promote Community Well-Being

Division of **CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES**

take **CARE**

Find out more at: takecarewv.org

¹Source: Special Tabulations from 2005-2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (<http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/740a.htm>)

The materials are available are available for local use and can be downloaded at
www.takecarewv.org.

Sources



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West Virginia Prescription Drug Abuse Quitline

1-866-WV-QUIT (1-866-987-8488)

The Quitline is a free service available 24/7 to any West Virginian who has concerns or questions about prescription drug abuse — about the process of quitting and about treatment centers and other help throughout the state.

All Quitline calls are confidential.

Information is also available on the web: wvxabuse.org.



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www.prevNET.org
304-766-6301

WV Center for Civic Life
www.wvcivicliflife.org
304-344-3430