



News Release

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State Workgroup Seeks to Curb Prescription-Drug Deaths

SACRAMENTO – California state agencies are combining resources to prevent deaths and injuries from prescription painkiller misuse and overdoses by alerting health care providers, pharmacists and the public to this epidemic.

[The Prescription Opioid Misuse and Overdose Prevention Workgroup](#) was formed to expand prevention strategies to decrease the amount of misuse, overdose and death from prescription pain medications.

“Drug overdose brings to mind illegal street drugs, like heroin, but many deaths due to drug abuse are from misuse of the legal prescription drugs that many people find in their medicine cabinets,” said Dr. Ron Chapman, state health officer and director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), who leads the workgroup.

In the U.S., drug overdoses kill more people than motor vehicle crashes. In 2012, there were more than 41,000 deaths in this country related to drug overdoses – with more than 50 percent related to pharmaceuticals. Opioid analgesics, like oxycodone, methadone or hydrocodone, were involved in about 3 of every 4 pharmaceutical overdose deaths. The cost of health care related to abuse of opioid pain relievers is estimated at more than \$70 billion. In California, reported deaths involving opioid prescription medications have increased 16.5 percent since 2006. In 2012, there were more than 1,800 deaths from all types of opioids – 72 percent involved prescription opioids.

The number of people being treated for prescription opioid abuse in publicly funded or monitored programs in California has nearly doubled since 2007. These medications are often obtained legally, but then taken incorrectly or used by people they are not prescribed for, such as a friend or relative.

The workgroup includes [CDPH](#), the departments of Health Care Services, Justice, Education and Consumer Affairs, California State Board of Pharmacy, Medical Board of California, Dental Board of California, and Emergency Medical Services Authority.

One of the workgroup's goals is to provide information about the [California Medical Board's recently revised guidelines for prescribing controlled substances for pain.](#)

"We want to provide tools that will lead to better discussions between providers, pharmacists and their patients," added Kimberly Kirchmeyer, executive director of the Medical Board of California. "The Board's new guidelines will assist in this endeavor."

"Treating pain is complicated and prescription drugs do have an appropriate use. Health care providers and their patients should discuss the benefits and risks of prescription pain medications, and consider all treatment options," said Dr. Chapman.

In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention declared [prescription drug abuse a nationwide epidemic](#). The Association of State and Territorial Health Officers issued its [President's Challenge 2014](#), with the goal of bringing together state health officials and their partners to identify ways to reduce the toll associated with prescription drug misuse, abuse and overdose.



#CA_OpioidSafety