

# Strategies to Reduce the Harm of Prescription Drug Misuse: Findings from the Research Literature

## WEBINAR SUMMARY

**Webinar Series:** Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse: Prevention Strategies from the Research Literature (Part 3)

**Date:** May 30, 2017

The final in a three-part series, this webinar explores strategies aimed at reducing the harm (i.e., fatal and non-fatal overdoses) associated with prescription drug misuse. Experts from the field describe the core components of these strategies, explore potential advantages and disadvantages, and identify CAPT resources to support grantees with their strategy selection and implementation.

Strategies presented in the webinar are organized according to three categories: prescriber education, overdose education, and naloxone education and distribution. Each is summarized below.

### PRESCRIBER EDUCATION STRATEGIES

Prescriber education strategies to reduce harm associated with prescription drug misuse typically involve teaching prescribers about:

- How to recognize an individual at risk for developing an addiction
- When and how to refer a patient to addiction treatment
- How to talk to patients about overdose risks and important prevention measures
- How to use tools, such as PDMPs, to identify patients at increased risk for overdose
- Other strategies to prevent overdose deaths that involve prescribers (such as prescribing naloxone to patients at increased risk for overdose and writing third-party naloxone prescriptions to family members and peers)

#### Advantages:

- Potentially cost-effective
- Opportunity to inform prescribers about new best practices (e.g., guidelines and alternatives to habit-forming medications)

#### Challenges:

- Target population can be busy and difficult to reach
- More effective when used by all prescribers and pharmacists
- May require prescriber or recognized medical expert to implement

### OVERDOSE EDUCATION STRATEGIES

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Overdose education strategies to reduce harm associated with prescription drug misuse typically involve teaching those close to the problem about:

- How to prevent overdoses from occurring
- How to recognize when an individual is at risk for overdose
- How to recognize when an overdose is occurring
- How to appropriately respond to an overdose
- Laws relevant to overdoses (such as Good Samaritan laws, which provide certain protections for those responding to an overdose)

There are many potential audiences for overdose education, including healthcare professionals, professional first responders, people who use prescription opioids, people who use opioids illicitly, and family members of people who use opioids illicitly. Specific strategies will vary depending on the target audience.

#### Advantages:

- Can raise awareness of dangers of opioid misuse
- Can be combined with other strategies, such as naloxone distribution

#### Challenges:

- Warning about dangerous substances on the market can lead individuals with dependence to seek out other harmful substances
- Good Samaritan laws are not present in all states and are only effective if both law enforcement and potential 9-1-1 callers are educated
- Accessing people who use drugs (and their friends/families) can be challenging

### NALOXONE\* EDUCATION AND DISTRIBUTION

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**Naloxone distribution programs** provide naloxone access to individuals at risk for overdose, as well as first responders who may witness an overdose.

**Naloxone education** can inform prescribers, dispensers, potential first responders, and even the broader community of the role of naloxone in preventing overdoses.

It is important for prevention practitioners to understand the landscape of the overdose-related laws in their state, particularly those related to naloxone access. These laws vary by state and by type and can include:

- Traditional prescription model, where individuals obtain naloxone for themselves through a prescription from their healthcare provider

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\*Naloxone is an opioid antidote that can prevent overdoses by blocking opioid receptor sites in a person's nervous system, reversing the effects of an overdose before it becomes fatal.

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- Third party prescriptions, where individuals can obtain a prescription for naloxone, not for themselves, but because they believe they are likely to encounter someone who may overdose
- Collaborative practice agreements, where a prescriber grants their prescribing authority to a pharmacist, allowing the pharmacist to determine whether someone should receive naloxone
- Standing orders, where prescribers authorize one designated group (such as pharmacists) to provide naloxone to another designated group of people under certain circumstances (such as individuals at risk for overdose)
- Protocol orders, where the state pharmacist licensing board authorizes pharmacists, as part of their scope of practice, to dispense naloxone as they deem appropriate

### Advantages:

- Reduces rates of overdose deaths
- When naloxone is administered by a professional first responder, these first responders can also refer additional services to individuals who use drugs
- Promotes proper use of naloxone

### Challenges:

- Can reduce fatalities but not the underlying substance use disorder
- Prevention practitioners may face critiques that giving naloxone to people who use drugs could encourage further use (although there is no data to support this)

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES FOCUSED ON HARM REDUCTION

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Although prevention practitioners may not be directly involved, the following strategies also focus on reducing the harm of prescription drugs:

- **Efforts to Connect Individuals to Treatment.** These strategies include increasing access and connecting individuals to treatment for substance use disorders, especially medication-assisted treatment (MAT). By treating the underlying opioid misuse disorders, you are reducing the risk that individuals will experience an overdose
- **Strategies to Reduce Non-Opioid Prescription Overdoses.** These strategies include antidotes (e.g., Flumazenil for benzodiazepine overdoses), guidance for prescribers (e.g., risks associated with mixing prescriptions) and safe storage recommendations to prevent accidental poisoning

## CAPT RESOURCES

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SAMHSA's CAPT has a wide selection of resources on strategies to prevent prescription drug misuse and opioid overdose available to the public on [www.samhsa.gov/capt/](http://www.samhsa.gov/capt/). Examples include:

- **Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse: Overview of Factors and Strategies.** Presents key findings from a review of current research on NMUPD, including a summary of risk and protective factors associated with prescription drug misuse, and programs and strategies that have been shown to be effective in addressing these factors.

## SAMHSA'S CENTER FOR THE APPLICATION OF PREVENTION TECHNOLOGIES

- **Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse: Understanding Who Is at Risk.** Summarizes information from cross-sectional and longitudinal studies on factors that have been shown to either increase risk of or protect against NMUPD, based on articles published between 2006 and 2012.
- **Preventing Prescription Drug Misuse: Programs and Strategies.** Provides brief summaries of prevention strategies and associated programs that have been evaluated to determine their effects on NMUPD, including an overview of the relevant literature, descriptions of individual studies, and guidelines for using this information to inform prevention planning efforts.