



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Prescription Drug Abuse Workgroup Issues Report

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BURLINGTON – A Prescription Drug Abuse Workgroup, with 75 members from varied professions, **issued a final report** in December that outlines a statewide approach to actively address the mounting problem of prescription drug abuse in Vermont.

The workgroup, convened jointly by the Vermont Departments of Health and Public Safety, has met quarterly since 2008 to discuss possible solutions to the problem in four focus areas: education and community prevention/treatment, monitoring, disposal, and law enforcement.

Vermont ranks 34th worst of all states in the nonmedical use of pain relievers, and has the second highest per capita rate of all states for admissions to treatment for opiates for 20- to 29-year olds. (*updated 02/01/12*)

Improved prescriber education for medical students, public education on proper disposal of drugs, better informed patients and patient verification, enhanced law enforcement efforts and training, and more widespread use of the Vermont Prescription Monitoring System are among the solutions proposed in the report.

“Prescription drug abuse is a major public health concern and we knew – for the Health Department and Public Safety to adequately address the problem – an ‘all-hands-on deck’ approach was required,” said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD. “The safe dispensing of these controlled medications, which serve a useful purpose, is a major priority for us and our partners statewide.”

The Health Department, University of Vermont College of Medicine, Vermont Medical Society, Office of Professional Regulation, Northern New England Poison Center, Department of Health Access, Department of Banking, Insurance, Securities and Health Care Administration (BISHCA), Vermont Boards of Pharmacy and Medical Practice, and the Vermont State Police contributed recommendations to the final report.

Special opiate training for medical residents at the University of Vermont College of Medicine and a best-practice standardized narcotic agreement that can be used by the Vermont medical community are among the specific action plans. The report also recommends that all prescribers of controlled substances use the Vermont Prescription Monitoring System. Currently, 1,370 of the 2,000 prescribers of controlled substances (physicians, dentists, nurses and physician assistants) in Vermont are registered with the VPMS, which went into effect statewide in 2009.

The report also recommends that law enforcement address sources of narcotics that are diverted for improper use through illegal sale and distribution by health care professionals and workers, “doctor shopping,” forged prescriptions, employee theft, pharmacy theft, and obtaining prescriptions over the Internet.

The workgroup hoped to bring the issue of prescription drug abuse to the forefront and discuss the idea of an awareness campaign across the state, and to educate pharmacists and prescribers in a systematic way. The Vermont plan is modeled after a national plan by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP).

For the full report, visit healthvermont.gov.

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