

Broadening the Scope of Prescription Drug Misuse Prevention

Making progress to lessen the impact of prescription drug misuse will require that we broaden the scope of prevention. Intervening to prevent further misuse once it has occurred will not in and of itself change the current trajectory of this public health challenge. Instead, we must prioritize primary prevention; activities intended to prevent the initiation of misuse to begin with. Several considerations are provided below to help guide such efforts.

Prioritize Evidence-Informed Approaches

The best approaches are guided by the existing research on effective prevention practice. They seek to address individual-level factors that influence behavior, aligning with personal values to build self-efficacy and self-management skills.

Build Consensus About What Exactly We are Trying to Prevent

There is generally consensus about how to respond to overdose, but a lack of consensus about how to prevent it from occurring. This ambivalence can lead to inaction, or a myopic view of prevention. Neither will lead us to the outcomes we are seeking.

Prescription Opioids Are Not the Only Medications That Are Misused

We must broaden the lens through which we view the prescription drug threat to create consistent messaging about the risks associated with non-medical use of any prescription medication.



Effective Education Must Begin Early and With A Focus On Shifting Misperceptions

Social norms –the beliefs we hold about how our peers think and act –are highly prone to error. Young people especially overestimate the prevalence and social acceptance of prescription drug misuse. Correcting these misperceptions can help shift what is accepted as “normal” or “typical” behavior, thereby challenging that behavior.

Don't Overlook the Mental Health Landscape

Research has identified a clear link between mental health challenges and prescription drug misuse. This underscores the need to ensure that prescription drug safety efforts incorporate strategies to help people develop a deeper understanding of their personal mental well-being as well as the skills to identify and respond appropriately to any concerns.

Help Patients Become Informed Consumers of Prescription Drugs

By becoming informed consumers of prescription medications, patients – and their caregivers – can significantly impact the prescription drug landscape.