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## Using Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs to Address Drug Abuse

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States are increasingly turning to prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs)—state-run electronic databases that capture information about dispensed controlled substances—as a tool to address prescription drug abuse. The rate of deaths related to opioid pain reliever overdoses quadrupled between 1999 and 2010, and in 2011, these prescription drugs were involved in more deaths than cocaine and heroin combined. States have adopted many new laws during the past few years aimed at preventing prescription drug abuse, misuse and overdose. At least 27 states passed more than 50 laws in 2014 alone, and 16 launched PDMPs since 2010. Some of these laws strengthened existing statewide PDMPs, which are designed not only to address prescription drug abuse, but also to prevent diversion, which refers to medications illegally sold on the street.

Statewide prescription drug monitoring programs consist of electronic databases that contain information from pharmacies about prescriptions they dispense for controlled substances. Prescriber use of PDMPs may be voluntary or mandatory, but many states require practitioners who dispense these drugs to also submit prescription information to the PDMP. The PDMPs provide secure online access to prescription data to authorized users such as prescribers and pharmacists, although who is permitted to access the data differs by state. The data include information such as the date dispensed, patient name, prescriber, pharmacy, name and strength of the drug, and quantity dispensed.

These monitoring programs serve several functions, such as identifying drug-seeking behaviors or “doctor shopping,” when patients attempt to obtain controlled substances from several prescribers. PDMPs also can be used by professional licensing boards to identify inappropriate clinician prescribing and dispensing, and to help law enforcement agencies investigate possible illegal activity, depending on the state.

### State Action

Forty-nine states have established a prescription drug monitoring program, a PDMP has been authorized for the District of Columbia, and legislation currently is pending in Missouri. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia allow programs to send data reports proactively to stakeholders about possible questionable activity involving controlled substances, such as doctor shopping. Recipients of these reports include prescribers and pharmacists. Such reports not only notify prescribers and pharmacists that patients may be abusing or diverting controlled substances, but also can help practitioners make better decisions to safely and effectively manage patients’ pain. While many monitoring programs authorized to

### Did You Know?

- Forty-nine states have established prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) to address misuse and abuse of controlled substances.
- Pilot programs have shown that connecting prescribers’ PDMPs using health information technology results in improved patient care.
- Legislators can access up-to-date information about their state PDMP at the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program Training and Technical Assistance Center.

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distribute such reports proactively are doing so, some are working to address barriers, such as determining criteria for questionable activity or establishing a delivery mechanism for the reports. Each state's PDMP can provide the status of its proactive alert.

States are improving or optimizing their PDMPs by ensuring their effective use by stakeholders. More