

Oregon House Committee on Health Care
HB 2386 and HB 2645
March 6, 2017

Bill Summary: Directs each manufacturer of certain types of drugs that are sold within this state to develop and implement drug take-back program for purpose of collecting from individuals and nonbusiness entities those types of drugs for disposal.

Chair Greenlick, members of the Committee on Healthcare, my name is Paul Lewis. I serve as the Health Officer for Multnomah County and the Tricounty Health Officer for Clackamas, Multnomah, and Washington Counties. I have also been a practicing pediatrician for 30 years, the last 21 in Oregon.

My predecessor, Dr Gary Oxman, identified prescription drug misuse as an emerging problem more than 10 years ago. He supported multiple Oregon legislative efforts to make Naloxone, the antidote for opioid overdose, more widely available throughout the state but he long ago realized that multiple strategies, in addition to Naloxone, are needed to tame this problem.

Safe prescription drug disposal is important for many reasons. Most important to me as a pediatrician is in preventing accidental poisoning; when unused prescription medications stay in homes they put both kids and adults at risk; young kids do not know better can ingest them by mistake and adults and youth, who should know better, can intentionally misuse or sell unfinished medications. Safe, convenient drug disposal also prevents unnecessary contamination of our landfills and sewage treatment plants with potent medications of all kinds; ultimately this keeps drugs out of the wildlife environment and the water we drink. Doctors, nurses, and dentist keep the pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies busy; a conservative estimate is that 1.2 billion pills are dispensed each year in Oregon from more than 40 million prescriptions written.¹ With this volume of prescribing, the need for safe disposal of unused medications is clear. As of today, in the Portland metro region with a population of over 1.6 million, there are only 4 drug disposal drop boxes-installed by forward thinking institutions including Legacy Mt Hood, two Walgreens, and Multnomah County .

Safe disposal is important for all medications but I will briefly focus on the role disposal can play in preventing addiction, overdose and fatalities from opioids.

Opioids like morphine, hydrocodone, and oxycodone are potent pain killers, we need them for humane treatment of painful conditions, after surgery, and sometimes for comfort at the end of life. This power to soothe has been known since at least ancient greece but so has the power of these drugs to kill if the dose is too high. Unfortunately, in the past 15 years, legally prescribed opioid pills have not only killed hundreds of Oregonians but they are also linked to opioid dependence, addiction, and transition to illegal opioids such as heroin-national surveys illustrate that 3 of 4 heroin users report first getting hooked on pills; a survey of over 500 heroin users done in the summer of 2016 in Portland found that over 50% first became addicted to pills before switching to heroin.² The deaths from prescription pills include both accidental

overdoses and suicides; both manners of death occur at least in part because these drugs are so abundant. How abundant? in 2015, over 1.4 million opioid prescriptions were written for residents of the Portland metro area - nearly one prescription per resident. If these drugs are unused or unneeded, easy drug disposal is a common sense, achievable, existing strategy to get these pills out of medicine cabinets.

In the Portland metro tricounty area nearly 1300 individuals died from opioid overdose (1298) between 2009 and 2015 and in half the cause of death was prescription pills, not heroin². Preventing fatal opioid overdose is the primary goal of the Tricounty Opioid Safety Coalition but this large multidisciplinary group knows that it needs multiple, simultaneous, strategies to be successful including:

- Promoting safe prescribing standards for doctors, dentists, nurse practitioners and naturopathic physicians
- Educating patients and the public through efforts like anyonepdx.org
- Expanding access to effective treatment for both chronic pain and opioid addiction
- Continuing to work to make naloxone more available and
- Regularly monitoring deaths, overdoses, and prescribing to know if our our efforts are working.

We support legislative efforts to make routine disposal of unused prescription drugs easy. This will help to keep children, adults, and the environment safe.

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References

¹ Total number of medical prescriptions dispensed in the U.S. from 2009 to 2015 (in millions) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/238702/us-total-medical-prescriptions-issued/> accessed 3/6/2017

² Tricounty Region Opioid Trends 2016 executive summary available at <https://multco.us/file/59893/download> full report at <https://multco.us/file/59894/download>