

Collaborating to Address the Opioid Crisis

Tips for Engaging with Prescribers to Prevent Opioid Misuse

Prescribers are both gatekeepers for, and key sources of information about, prescription opioids. They can advise patients about the potential risks and side effects of opioids, as well as about their safe storage, use, and disposal. In addition, prescribers control access to many of the prescription opioids currently in circulation; they are also well-positioned to identify and support patients at elevated risk for misuse and overdose. For these reasons, they can help to reduce both the supply of and demand for prescription opioids, and to increase the use of alternative approaches to addressing pain.

Prevention practitioners can play an important role in supporting and/or developing programming to educate prescribers on these important opioid misuse prevention strategies. (See [*Opportunities for Collaborating with Medical Professionals to Prevent Opioid Misuse*](#)). Yet for practitioners who are unaccustomed to working with these new partners, assuming this role can sometimes feel daunting: there's new terminology to learn, new schedules to accommodate, and new engagement approaches to consider.

This tool provides practical tips for connecting with and involving prescribers in prescriber education programs. With the right preparation, working with prescribers can be rewarding and yield significant progress in the fight to address the opioid crisis.

Engagement Tips

- ✓ **Find a Champion.** Program champions are individuals respected in their fields who are willing to serve as the “face” of a given issue. Having a champion—in this case, a prescriber in your area who is committed to addressing opioid misuse and vocal about his or her commitment—can provide legitimacy for your prescriber education efforts and help you bring other providers on board. One way to find a champion is by scouring your local news sources and medical journals. Is there a prescriber who is regularly quoted in news stories about the opioid crisis? Who is doing research in this area? Who sits on the boards of local treatment facilities? Another strategy is to attend community meetings and forums dedicated to the problem or to invite prospective champions to your own presentations.

- ✓ **Make Engagement as Easy as Possible.** For many prescribers, time is their most precious commodity. With this in mind, place convenience and flexibility at the top of your list when developing programming for this group. Recognize that you may need to go to them. Schedule meetings onsite at hospitals and clinics. Find opportunities to incorporate education sessions into existing professional development programming. Where appropriate (and where resources allow), develop 'just-in-time' online learning opportunities that allow prescribers to develop new skills according to their own schedules.
- ✓ **Don't Assign Blame.** It's easy for public health professionals to insist from afar that the key to solving the opioid crisis is to simply decrease the amount of prescribed opiates. But today's opioid crisis is complex and rooted in multiple causes. Laying the blame solely on prescribing practices ignores the commitment of most prescribers to keeping their patients safe and pain-free. Rather than pointing fingers, focus on your shared interest in saving lives, and the critical role that prescribers can play in this process.
- ✓ **Embrace Data!** Medical professionals value and understand the importance of data, so don't be afraid to use it to make the case for prevention efforts. Prescribers who are required to use prescription drug monitoring programs (PDMPs) to assess individual patient risk, for example, may be interested in learning about how PDMP data is being used to inform population-level change. These data can also help build the case for new prevention programming. When sharing data, make sure to be transparent about the limitations of the research you present.
- ✓ **Define Your Terms.** As with any new partnership, make sure to avoid jargon and define key terms. For example, within the medical field the term "practitioner" typically describes someone working in a clinical setting; in the prevention field, it describes any professional trained to do prevention work in the community. Even the term "prevention" may be interpreted differently by different professions. For medical staff, prevention may be limited to strategies that are closely related to a given problem (like using naloxone to prevent an opioid overdose). For prevention practitioners, prevention encompasses a much broader set of strategies, including more "upstream" approaches to reducing risk (such as home visiting to infants who are born to parents with an opioid addiction).
- ✓ **Listen! Listen! Listen!** Remember, you may be the experts in prevention, but your partners in the medical field are the experts in medicine. They are on the forefront of patient care. They also have firsthand knowledge of the possibilities and challenges of implementing provider education programming. So invite their input. Listen to their opinions. Ask probing questions and seek clarification when you don't understand. A true partnership depends on the active involvement of all partners. Listening is the foundation for this relationship.

Additional Resources

One of the most common outcomes of practitioner-prescriber partnerships to address opioid-related prescribing practices is the development of prescribing guidelines. Prescribing guidelines are designed to provide clear and consistent instructions for managing acute and chronic pain. Most are intended to maintain physician clinical autonomy while also providing a framework for safe prescription of opioids for pain management.

These two stories offer examples of successful collaborations to improve prescribing practices:

- [Ohio Partners Work Together to Reduce the Flow of Prescribed Opiates](#). To reduce opioid misuse, the Ohio Governor's Cabinet Opiate Action Team, comprising representatives from the governor's office, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and health care providers, created a clear set of opioid prescribing guidelines.
- [Florida Coalition Forges Strong Partnerships to Reduce Opioid Misuse](#). Cross-sector collaboration helps Drug Free Sarasota's multi-component community awareness campaign and training for safe prescribing of opioids.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has developed a [tool to help physicians](#) calculate the safest daily dosage of opioids. This tool has is being used by multiple states to develop state-specific prescribing guidelines. To review opioid prescribing guidelines adopted by each state, visit: <https://www.affirmhealth.com/blog/opioid-prescribing-guidelines-a-state-by-state-overview>.