



## TOPIC

# Enhancing Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) and Mandating Their Use

## PROBLEM

Every U.S. state has a PDMP, an electronic database that tracks controlled substance prescriptions. They are intended to reduce “doctor shopping” and to prevent patients from being prescribed dangerous drug combinations by different doctors.

However, not all states require prescribers to check the PDMP when dispensing opioids and other controlled substances. PDMPs cannot protect patients if health care providers do not use them as a resource. PDMPs vary substantially in terms of their comprehensiveness, ease of use, and structure.

## SOLUTIONS



PDMPs allow health care providers to see patients' prescription histories before making decisions regarding future prescriptions. They can—and should—also be used by state health departments to understand the nature of the epidemic and to evaluate potential solutions.



States should require prescribers and/or pharmacists to check the PDMP when prescribing or dispensing opioids and other controlled substances (e.g., benzodiazepines).

## CONCLUSION

PDMPs can help reduce doctor-shopping, but only if they are well-designed and properly resourced.

Because addicted patients identified as doctor-shoppers may switch from prescription opioids to heroin/fentanyl, effective addiction treatment must be made available to avoid unintended effects of PDMPs.



## KEY POLICY EVIDENCE

Evaluations of state PDMPs usually find that they modestly reduce opioid prescribing and prescription opioid overdoses.

A U.S.-wide study found that when prescribers are mandated to check the PDMP, prescription opioid deaths decreased by 9% and benzodiazepine deaths decreased by 11%.

Because PDMPs may stimulate some opioid-addicted individuals to switch from prescription opioids to heroin/fentanyl, the benefit they produce in reducing prescription opioid overdoses may be cancelled out by increases in illicit opioid overdoses, at least in the short term.

A study of PDMP quality found that they were more effective at reducing prescription opioid overdose deaths when they mandated prescriber use, had an oversight board and evaluation of effectiveness, and received stable funding.



So much of the media attention now is appropriately focused on heroin and illicit fentanyl, but prescription opioids are still a leading cause of death. And more than 11 million people in the U.S. are misusing prescription opioids, primarily obtained directly or indirectly through a doctor's prescription. That compares to about a million people using heroin."

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