

the solution

Secure medicine return works for Washington

A pilot program—led by Group Health Cooperative and Bartell Drugs in partnership with state and local governments and non-profit groups—has collected more than 15,000 pounds of unwanted medicines from households since October 2006. The pilot stage has concluded, but twenty-five Group Health Pharmacies and twelve Bartell Drugs in six counties continue to provide secure medicine return to meet the needs of their patients and customers.



There is high demand for a medicine return program, but this interim program operates on temporary grant funding. Finding a long-term source of financing for a statewide program is the key to success.

A successful pilot program has shown there is a great demand for a safe and secure way to dispose of unwanted prescription and over-the-counter drugs. We are now working to create a secure, ongoing medicine return program for Washington State.

Learn more at:
www.medicinereturn.com

The long-term solution: a sustainable state-wide medicine return program

We need a statewide return system for unused consumer medicines that is convenient, safe, secure and cost-effective for all residents. Unwanted medicines need to be safely disposed, reducing accidental poisonings, misuse, and environmental impacts.

Medicine manufacturers are best poised to fund and manage a statewide medicine return program. They have the expertise, relationships, and resources to establish safe, secure and effective programs. Manufacturers already fund similar medicine return programs in Canada, France, Spain and Italy. Local governments cannot take on the unfunded burden of safely disposing of unwanted pharmaceuticals.

How much would a statewide program cost?

Washington State residents spend \$3.1 billion annually on over-the-counter and prescription medicines. In comparison, the costs for a safe medicine return program are expected to have a very small impact, if any, on the price of medicines—at most one or two pennies per package of medicine.

Printed on recycled paper. December 2008



Safe Medicine Return in Washington State



Learn more at:
www.medicinereturn.com

the problem



Unused medications pose a risk to our families, communities and the environment. This brochure describes the problem of unwanted medicines and efforts to create a sustainable long-term solution.

Safely dispose of your unused medications at a participating pharmacy. Find a location at www.medicinereturn.com.

Note: our limited demonstration program cannot take narcotics or other controlled substances.

Medicine Return Program in Washington State

- Interagency Resource for Achieving Cooperation
- Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County
- Northwest Product Stewardship Council
- Pacific NW Pollution Prevention Resource Center
- Public Health-Seattle & King County
- Snohomish County Public Works Solid Waste Division
- Washington State Department of Ecology

Project Advisors: Washington State Board of Pharmacy, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services-Aging and Disability Services Administration

Pharmacy Partners: Bartell Drugs, Group Health Cooperative

The amount of unwanted medicines is significant. A study estimated that between 30% and 80% of patients do not finish commonly prescribed medicines such as pain medicines, antibiotics, and beta blockers. (Bound and Voulvoulis, Environmental Health Perspectives, 2005)

Accidental poisonings

Accidental poisonings have grown 395% since 1990, with 85% of unintentional poisoning deaths involving medications in 2006. (Washington State Department of Health, 2008)

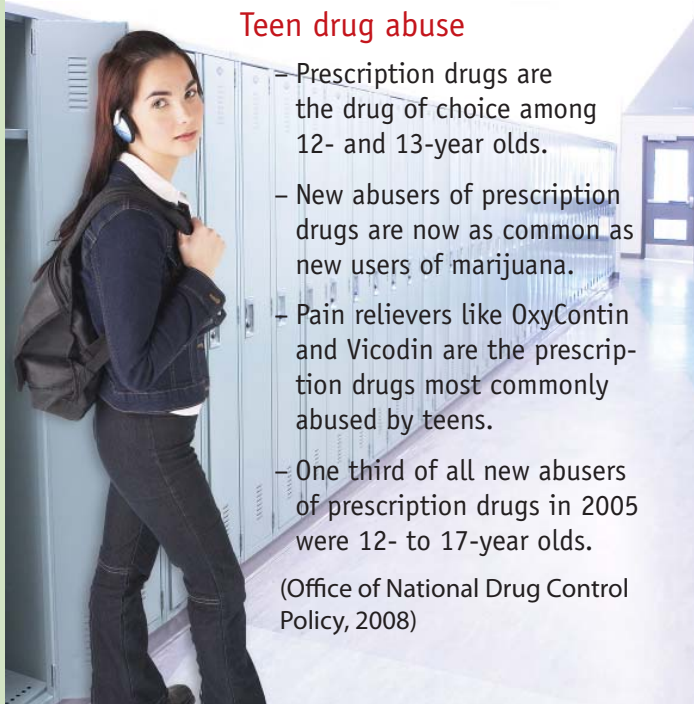
Drug abuse

Unused medicines increase opportunities for drug abuse. Over half of the people using prescription drugs for nonmedical reasons obtained them from a friend or relative. (National Survey of Drug Use and Health, 2006)

Teen drug abuse

- Prescription drugs are the drug of choice among 12- and 13-year olds.
- New abusers of prescription drugs are now as common as new users of marijuana.
- Pain relievers like OxyContin and Vicodin are the prescription drugs most commonly abused by teens.
- One third of all new abusers of prescription drugs in 2005 were 12- to 17-year olds.

(Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2008)



"We are cleaning out my grandfather's house and I have a suitcase full of drugs that we need to get rid of..."

Environmental contamination

Pharmaceuticals enter our waters from toilets or sinks, the garbage, or when humans and animals pass drugs through their bodies.

■ Why not flush medicines down the toilet?

Wastewater and septic systems are not designed to treat these chemicals. Flushing medicines adds to pollution in our waters.

Organic wastewater contaminants, including medicines, were found in 80% of 139 streams sampled in 30 states. (U.S. Geological Survey, 2002)

Low levels of pharmaceuticals were recently found in the drinking water of 24 U.S. cities serving 41 million people. (AP survey data, 2008)

■ Why not just throw medicines in the trash?

While disposal in the trash is better than flushing, there are problems with this as well. Medicines thrown in the trash can be picked up by children, pets, or anyone who rummages through the trash.

Throwing medicines in the trash pollutes our environment too because drugs can end up in landfill leachate (the liquid that develops in landfills). In most landfills, the leachate is collected and pumped to a wastewater treatment plant. Treatment removes some of these chemicals but not all, and small amounts end up in surface waters or biosolids.