

A series of technical assistance  
manuals for community coalitions

52

**STRATEGIZER<sup>®</sup>**

**TEEN PRESCRIPTION  
DRUG ABUSE:  
AN EMERGING THREAT**  
STRATEGIES TO PREVENT PRESCRIPTION  
DRUG ABUSE AMONG TEENS  
IN YOUR COMMUNITY

 **CADCA<sup>®</sup>**

# TEEN PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE: AN EMERGING THREAT

*Developed by Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) in  
Collaboration with ONDCP's National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign*

## STRATEGIES TO PREVENT PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE AMONG TEENS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

*Meet Jay, a good student whose parents had no idea he was going to school high on prescription drugs. He'd been abusing drugs since he was 13. Percocet, OxyContin, Xanax, Vicodin, Ritalin, and Adderall were his drugs of choice. He entered treatment at age 17.*

*Then there's Sara, who started abusing drugs at age 12. She said she could get her hands on prescription drugs just as fast as she could buy a pizza. She'd pop a pill anywhere, anytime, and no one noticed. Now Sara's in recovery for prescription drug abuse, as well.*

*And finally, there's Eddie, whose abuse of prescription drugs led to his death after overdosing on a mix of pills. A toxicology report indicated that he had 134 milligrams of Xanax – the equivalent of 67 pills – in his system when he died. Says Eddie's mother, "Police, teachers, and parents are so fixated on street drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and Ecstasy that they are missing the start of an epidemic."*

Thanks to years of hard work on the national and community level, teen drug use is down overall. However, one category is actually on the rise. In fact, more teens now abuse prescription drugs than any illicit drug except marijuana, more than cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined. Teens

believe abusing prescription drugs is safer than using illicit drugs, but these drugs can be addictive and dangerous. These medications may be readily available to teens, and many parents are not aware that teens are abusing these drugs.

Prescription drug abuse poses a unique challenge for coalitions and prevention organizations for many reasons: parents' lack of knowledge about prescription drug abuse and its dangers, a belief among teens that prescription drugs are a "safe" way to get high, and easy access to these drugs at home and from friends. This new Strategizer, *Teen Prescription Drug Abuse: An Emerging Threat*, will help coalitions address these serious challenges. It supplies the latest facts and strategies on how to bring parents, educators, healthcare practitioners, and other caring adults to the table so that teens like Jay, Sara, and Eddie are better protected. Here's what you'll learn:

- Facts about Prescription Drug Abuse
- Strategies for Effective Prevention
- Promising Approaches for Coalitions
- Resources Available to You

# FACTS ABOUT PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

There are three classes of prescription drugs that are most commonly abused by teenagers:

- **Painkillers** (prescribed to treat pain), including codeine, oxycodone, fentanyl, morphine, and brands such as Vicodin, Tylenol with Codeine, OxyContin, and Percocet.
- **Depressants** (prescribed to treat anxiety and sleep disorders), including barbiturates, benzodiazepines, and brands such as Klonopin, Nembutal, Soma, Valium, and Xanax.
- **Stimulants** (mainly prescribed to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder or ADHD), including amphetamines, methylphenidate, and brands such as Adderall, Concerta, Dexedrine, and Ritalin.

## Extent of Use

Prescription drugs, when used as prescribed, can be powerful and effective medicines. However, many teens are abusing prescription drugs to get high.

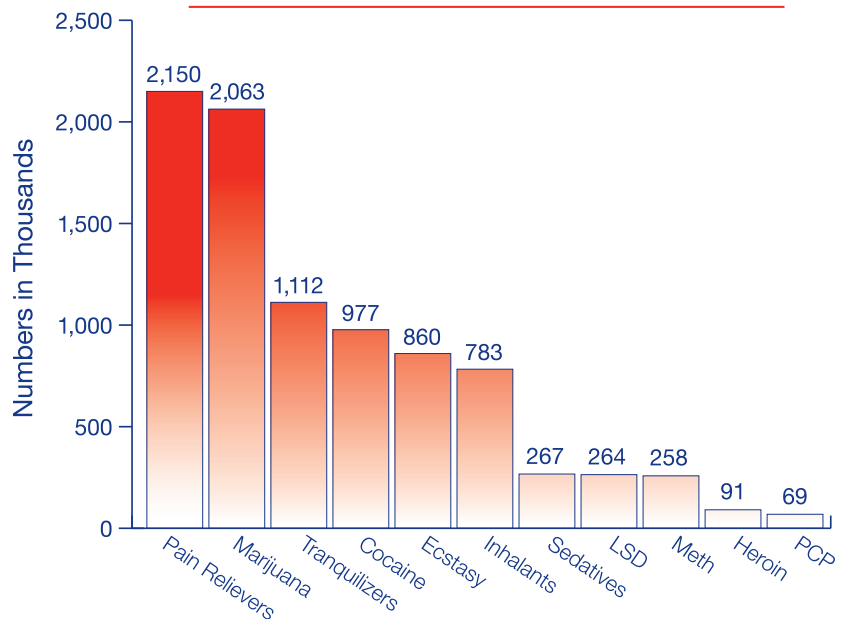
In fact, more teens abuse prescription drugs than any illicit drug except marijuana — more than cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined, according to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). More than 2.1 million teens ages 12 to 17 reported abusing prescription drugs in 2006. Among 12- and 13-year-olds, prescription drugs are their drug of choice (NSDUH, 2007).

Prescription painkillers like Vicodin and OxyContin are the most often abused prescription drugs (NSDUH, 2007). The most recent Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF) found that past-year abuse of Vicodin is particularly high among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders, with nearly one in 10 high school seniors reporting taking it in the past year without a doctor's approval (MTF, 2007). And the trend is growing; over a five year period (2002-2007), past-year use of OxyContin increased by 30 percent (MTF, 2007).

## Key Messages

- Although illicit drug use by teens is declining, teen prescription drug abuse is an emerging threat.
- Teens abuse prescription drugs more than any illicit drug except marijuana — more than cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined. Many teens wrongly believe that abusing prescription drugs is "safer" than using illicit drugs.
- Prescription drugs provide many benefits when used correctly under a doctor's care. But when abused, they can be just as dangerous as illicit drugs, especially when taken with alcohol or illicit drugs.
- Prescription drugs are easy to get, and most painkiller abusers reported getting them from friends or relatives, often for free.
- Parents and caregivers are the first line of defense, as prescription drugs are often found in the home.
- Parents can help protect their teens by keeping medications in a secure location and monitoring their use.
- Adults should properly conceal and dispose of old or unused medicines in the trash.

Past Year Initiates for Specific Illicit Drugs Among Persons Aged 12 and Older, 2006



Source: SAMHSA, 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (September 2007).

# Teen Prescription Drug Abuse: An Emerging Threat

## Signs and Symptoms of Prescription Drug Abuse

The health risks of prescription drug abuse depend on the drug and can be extremely serious, even deadly. For example, painkiller abuse can slow or stop breathing. Depressant abuse can result in seizures, respiratory depression, and decreased heart rate. Stimulant abuse can lead to high body temperature, irregular heart rate, cardiovascular system failure, and seizures. Teens who abuse prescription drugs often take them with other substances, such as alcohol, which can lead to dangerous drug interactions.

Prescription drugs can be addictive as well. Between 1995 and 2005, treatment admissions for prescription painkillers grew more than 300 percent (Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS), 2007).

While warning signs for prescription drug abuse vary with the type and amount of drug taken, key signs and symptoms include the following:

- Constricted pupils, slurred speech, flushed skin, sweating, and loss of appetite
- Personality changes, mood swings, irritability, excessive energy, sleepiness or avoiding sleep, forgetfulness, or clumsiness
- Increasingly acting secretive, losing interest in personal appearance, borrowing money or having extra cash, skipping classes, or not doing well in school
- Missing pills or the presence of unfamiliar pills or empty cough and cold medicine bottles or packages
- Running out of his/her medication too quickly, losing pills, or requesting refills

## Myths and Misconceptions

Prescription drug abuse prevention requires strategies that address a broad range of challenges, particularly a lack of knowledge and misinformation among teens as well as parents. These misperceptions should be taken into account as coalitions work to respond to this developing public health problem.

Over half of teens (56 percent or 12.8 million) do not see great risk in trying prescription pain relievers without a doctor's prescription (Partnership Attitude Tracking Study (PATS), 2007).

Teens say they abuse prescription painkillers because they believe they are safer to use than illicit drugs (41 percent), there is less shame attached to using them (37 percent), there are fewer side effects than illicit drugs (31 percent), and parents don't care as much if you get caught (20 percent) (PATS, 2007).

[www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com)



## Parental Lack of Knowledge

Because prescription drugs are prescribed by doctors and used appropriately by many for important health benefits, many parents may not think of these drugs as potential substances of abuse. They might not even know that they can be abused to get high.

Most parents are deeply concerned about their children's welfare when it comes to drugs. However, prevention practitioners and treatment providers working in the community indicate that many parents do not know the dangers of abusing prescription drugs, or the signs and symptoms of abuse. In fact, research shows that while parents are talking to teens about illicit drugs, they aren't talking as much about abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs (PATS, 2007). Coalitions should encourage parents to include prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs in those conversations.

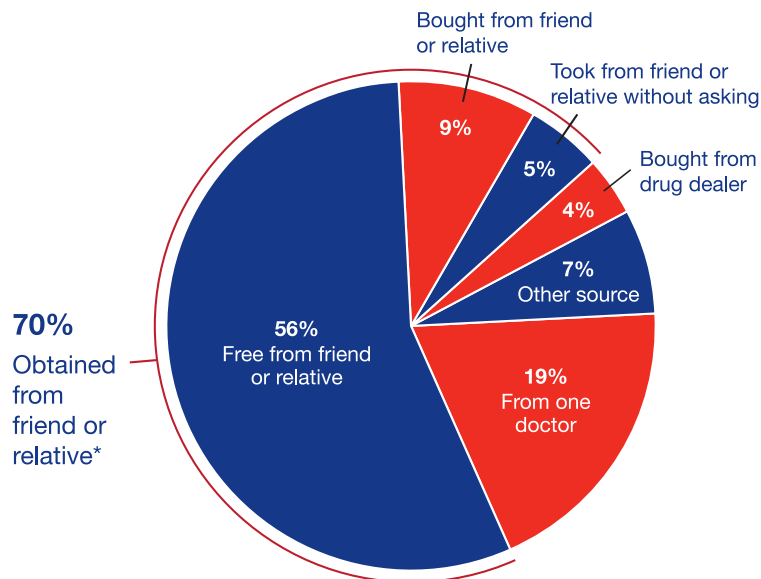
Some parents don't consider the possibility that their unused medicines could get into the wrong hands, and many don't know how to properly dispose of old medications.

Despite what most parents think, teens value their guidance. Parents are the most powerful influence on their kids when it comes to drugs, and, when parents set and enforce rules, teens are less likely to engage in risky behaviors.

## Internet Accessibility to Drug Information

While research indicates that most teens aren't getting prescription drugs from the Internet (less than 1 percent), evidence suggests that they visit manufacturer, pro-drug, and other Web sites to obtain dosage information, identify pills, learn about drug interactions and effects, and get information on beating drug tests. Teens also engage in chat rooms and blogs to compare notes about experiences with various drugs. This online drug culture, researchers believe, may contribute to a belief that prescription drug abuse is widespread and relatively risk-free.

Source of Pain Relievers for Most Recent Nonmedical Use Among Past Year Users 12 and Older



Past Year Nonmedical Users of Pain Relievers: 12.6 million

\*Percentage from friend or relative is derived before rounding of individual components.  
Source: SAMHSA, 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (September 2007).

## STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE PREVENTION

Coalitions are well suited to tackle teen prescription drug abuse because they know what works. You know that a multi-faceted approach, which includes public education, policy development, and environmental change can impact beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Consider these and similar prevention tactics to raise awareness, educate, influence attitudes and norms, demonstrate the benefits of behavior change, suggest or prompt an action, and refute myths and misconceptions.

Suggested strategies and interventions include:

- Organize a **roundtable discussion or town hall meeting** to discuss prescription drug abuse. The panel may include medical and parenting experts, school representatives, teens who are in recovery after treatment, and other parents. Gather available data and compile questions for the panelists. Depending on the size and format, invite the audience to join the discussion or ask questions. Consider inviting local media.
  - CADCA Strategizer 49 *Community Briefings: A Prevention Tool for Communities* can advise you on organizing a town hall meeting.
- Engage local media. Contact your **local newspaper or television or radio news desk**. You might offer them local experts to address the issue or families who have experienced the effects of prescription drug abuse. Media may also ask for facts or visuals, such as photos, charts, and video footage, to complete the story. Be sure any experts, parents, teens, or others feel comfortable speaking to the media and sharing personal information that may be published or broadcast. Be straightforward with media about personal information or details that may or may not be used in a story. You can also create and disseminate public service announcements that place the spotlight on the problem and your efforts. Use interesting news hooks, such as girls and drugs.
- Develop resources to share with your community. Resources may include **online content, community call-in numbers, or printed materials**, such as brochures, flyers, or posters with information and action items. Be sure to include a Web site or phone number where parents can go to get help and more information, including finding appropriate prevention programs and treatment centers in the area.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. Many national and state organizations may have **materials or resources** – many free of cost – that you can leverage and tailor for your community. For example, the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign offers a variety of resources, including print ads, to customize for your community, available at [www.TheAntiDrug.com/Resources](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com/Resources).
- Look for opportunities to **partner with appropriate corporate and community organizations**. Organizations such as the local school system, pharmacies, libraries, and local or state affiliates of the PTA, Urban League, and medical associations, may disseminate your materials, provide a venue for a town hall meeting, and/or include a story on your prevention efforts in their electronic or hardcopy newsletter. Companies may be able to sponsor an event or pay for printing brochures. However, it is important to make sure partnerships do not compromise the effectiveness of the anti-prescription drug abuse message. When you're looking for partners, remember that religious and community organizations that are already working with youth and their families can support your efforts. Help them create and implement youth-oriented curricula and other training activities. Be sure to engage the parent groups within these entities before youth programs are launched.
- Provide **parent-focused information and training** to entities that come in contact with parents and caregivers, including family counselors, EAP programs and business owners, pharmacists and

the medical community, law enforcement officers, and educators.

- Include **prevention messages and strategies** in coalition parent training activities. Or if there is a need, establish parent support groups or toll-free phone lines that focus on this problem.
- Create **materials for your coalition's Web site**. Develop and promote pages that target parents, health care providers, law enforcement personnel, and teens. Also consider linking to other sites, such as [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com).
- Encourage parents to **monitor their teenager's Internet use** and to look out for suspicious packages shipped to their son or daughter.
- Encourage parents to **keep track of the prescription and over-the-counter medicines** in their medicine cabinets.
- Ask your local pharmacies to **include a notice or flyer with every prescription** filled for painkillers or other medications, warning customers about the risks of abuse and offering tips to safeguard their medication.
- Work with local leaders to **set age restrictions** for purchasing frequently abused OTC medications.
- **Work with universities and medical schools** to ensure that doctors receive enough training on prescription and OTC medicine abuse or craft and implement training activities for medical schools and state/local medical societies.
- **Partner with your school system** to develop and implement staff and peer training, and ask your PTA to address the topic during one or more of its meetings.

**For more information on helpful strategies and interventions, read the *Implementation Primer: Putting Your Plan into Action*, developed by CADCA's National Coalition Institute, available at [www.coalitioninstitute.org](http://www.coalitioninstitute.org).**

## Engaging Experts

Coalitions may find it beneficial to engage a third party to educate parents about the dangers of teen prescription drug abuse. Often, medical experts, school professionals, other parents, teens who are in recovery after treatment, and families with personal stories can enrich, strengthen, and add credibility to your message.

## Over-the-Counter (OTC) Drug Abuse

### *OTC Brand Names*

Coricidin HBP Cough & Cold, Robitussin, Vicks Formula 44 Cough Relief, and others

### *The Facts*

In 2006, about 3.1 million people age 12 to 25 had used an OTC cough and cold medication to get high, and nearly 1 million had done so in the past year (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2008). CADCA has strived to put a much-needed spotlight on this emerging drug problem. Some young people are turning to grocery and drug store shelves and their family medicine cabinets to get high. And it's not just a couple of pills or an extra swig of cough syrup they're ingesting. In some cases, teens are taking anywhere from a few pills to dozens or more a day, drinking up to 3-5 bottles of cough syrup, or combining these preparations with alcohol.

OTC drugs of choice are cough and cold medicines containing dextromethorphan (DXM). A federally-funded university survey estimates the intentional abuse of cough medicine among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders at roughly 4 percent, 5 percent, and 6 percent respectively – on par with cocaine (MTF, 2007). Other OTC drugs abused are sleep aids (Unisom), antihistamines (Benadryl), and anti-nausea agents (Gravol or Dramamine).

### *Effects*

People who abuse OTC medicines can experience similar side effects to those experienced with prescription and illicit drugs. Overdose effects can vary greatly depending on what drugs are mixed, and the amount taken. Some OTC drugs are weak and cause minor distress, while others are very strong and can lead to more serious problems. Their abuse can cause memory problems, stomach pain, high blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, fever and headaches, rashes, and loss of consciousness.

### *What You Can Do*

- Remember that among teens and the adults who care for them, the perceived risks associated with OTC drugs are low.
- Include OTC medicines in your prevention and intervention activities.

**For more information go to [www.doseofprevention.org](http://www.doseofprevention.org).**



# Teen Prescription Drug Abuse: An Emerging Threat

Remember that you may need to educate these stakeholders on the threats of teen prescription drug abuse. Ensure that they are fully aware of the statistics, risks, signs, and symptoms of teen prescription drug abuse.

For example, engage health professionals – doctors, physician’s assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, counselors, first responders, and hospital personnel. Help them educate patients about the risks of prescription drug abuse, and ask them to teach their patients about how to safeguard their medicines. This information can be incorporated into the instructions that doctors provide to their patients when prescriptions are written. On the receiving end, pharmacists can include a small notice at the point of sale, which warns customers about the risks of abuse and offers safeguarding tips.

Teachers, counselors, school nurses, coaches, and administrators see teens nearly every day and can often identify problems before they escalate. School professionals are in a unique position to observe changes in academic and extra-curricular performance.

Keep the following in mind when developing prescription drug prevention plans, whether you’re working with parents, doctors, teachers, counselors, or teens:

- Craft messages that will resonate with the target audience.
- Be direct and succinct.
- Don’t demonize or blame doctors, medications, drug companies, parents, or society.
- Try not to normalize the problem by implying that all teens are abusing these drugs.
- Be responsive to ethnic, cultural, gender, and age differences related to teenage prescription drug use.
- Identify referral resources for prevention and treatment.

## **A Word of Advice on Youth-Focused Programs**

It’s important to carefully craft prevention and intervention strategies that do not inadvertently introduce adolescents to new information about how to abuse these drugs to get high or increase the belief that all teens are abusing these potentially dangerous substances. Here are some guidelines and facts that can help you develop youth interventions that avoid unintended outcomes:

- Limit the amount and type of information you share and carefully craft the messages so they don’t provide a path to abuse. This means excluding details about specific drugs that can be abused, where to get them, or how to abuse them to get high.
- Do not use language that suggests that all teens (or a great majority) are abusing prescription drugs.
- Avoid glamorizing or glorifying use, such as linking these drugs to popular celebrities and attractive peers or associating use with benefits, such as weight loss, increased energy, etc.
- Avoid using images of people taking these drugs and pictures of labels that identify specific medicines.
- For younger students, focus on principles of safe medication use so these practices will be normalized by the time they reach middle and high school.
- Ensure that environmental conditions are right well before teens are integrated into prevention activities. This means that parents, caregivers, and other influential adults must be educated first to create a solid foundation upon which teens can feel comfortable asking questions, knowing where resources are if problems arise, etc.



# PROMISING APPROACHES FOR COALITIONS

## Kentucky Prescription Drug Abuse Program Targets Pharmacists

*“In our community, pharmacists know you and your family, and people really trust their advice. They are presented each day with opportunities to educate the public. Our hope is that every pharmacist in Kentucky will do just that, using the materials in our Toolkit for Pharmacists. Our kids, teens, and adults need to know about the hazards of misusing and abusing prescription medicines, and the Toolkit’s messages, posters, and other materials provide the support that pharmacists need to help mobilize them into action.”*

**Karen Hall**  
**Director of Prevention Programs**  
**Regional Prevention Center of Comprehend, Inc.**  
**Maysville, KY**

Figures show that Kentucky has among the highest prescription drug abuse rates in the country, with parts of Eastern Kentucky leading the nation in the abuse of prescription pain medication. To address this, community leaders went straight to a group of trusted professionals often on the “front lines” of the prescription drug abuse issue – pharmacists.

According to national survey data, 8.5 percent of Kentuckians have used prescription drugs for non-medical purposes in the past year; and 7 percent have used pain relievers such as Darvon and Percodan for nonmedical use. In addition, a recent Kentucky Medical Examiners report showed that more people died from overdoses of hydrocodone and methadone last year than from heroin or cocaine.

The Regional Prevention Center of Comprehend, Inc., joined forces with the Kentucky Pharmacists Association to develop *Prescription Drug Abuse: A Toolkit for Pharmacists*. The kit empowers pharmacists to educate customers about the potential for abuse, especially if the customer is picking up a prescription for a highly addictive pain medication. In light of studies showing that teens often obtain their prescription

medications from their friends or relatives, Kentucky’s kit encourages pharmacists to advise their patients that if they don’t finish their medication, they should dispose of what’s left or hide it in a safe location.

In addition to facts about prescription drug abuse rates and trends, the kit contains prevention strategies that parents, teens, and elderly people can use to prevent the abuse of these drugs, and a brief intervention message that can be copied and attached to prescriptions for stimulants, opiates, sedatives/tranquilizers, and other potentially addictive medications, at the point of sale. The kits are being distributed to Kentucky’s 1,100 pharmacies through Kentucky’s 14 Regional Prevention Centers, which are part of the Kentucky Mental Health and Substance Abuse Centers.

The kit includes contact information about local community resources that pharmacy staff can use if a customer is looking for treatment for an addiction to prescription medications. Pharmacies also receive posters that can be displayed in their waiting areas reminding people to keep their medications hidden and in a safe place.

### Lessons learned:

- If you choose to work with pharmacists and other health practitioners, hand deliver your materials. It gives them the opportunity to ask questions while also enabling you to establish personal rapport.
- Ideally, make sure that you provide a cadre of materials – ads, fact sheets, palm cards, etc., that can be used in a variety of ways; also ensure that they are easily adaptable so stakeholders can take ownership of the collateral.
- Don’t be afraid to let these contacts guide you into broader playing fields. Talk with them; maintain contact; and allow your coalition to become a valuable resource as trust is established.

### For more information:

Karen Hall  
karen@u-need-2-know.com  
<http://u-need-2-know.com>



## Teen Prescription Drug Abuse: An Emerging Threat

### **New Jersey National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) Raises the Bar on Rx and OTC Abuse**

*“We’re taking every opportunity to spread the word that prescription drugs are dangerous when misused or abused. You’ve got to saturate the community with materials and training. You’ve got to encourage parents to openly and honestly talk with their teens about prescription and OTC abuse. Keep putting the message out there, and never stop.”*

**Linda Surks**  
**Coalition Coordinator**  
**NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc.**

While prescription drug abuse was not new to Middlesex County, NJ, a combination of a personal tragedy and an acknowledgment of a growing teen prescription drug abuse trend prompted this community to take action. In 2003, Linda Surks, the NCADD’s Coalition Coordinator, lost her son Jason to prescription drug abuse. A Rutgers pre-pharmacy student, Jason died as a result of a prescription drug overdose. He had ordered the drugs (without a prescription) online from a pharmacy in Mexico. Since Jason’s death, Surks and the NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc., have spearheaded the creation of a broad-based, statewide public awareness campaign and worked to implement prevention policies. Public service announcements, print media, curricula, and training targeting parents, the medical community, and teenagers are planned for a Spring 2008 launch.

“Availability and misperceptions about the harm these drugs can do when misused has complicated this issue, and we really have to sound the alarm,” says Surks. NCADD has already sounded that alarm through:

- A recent Town Hall on OTC abuse that resulted in an extensive report on the status of the problem and next steps.
- Conferences and training programs targeting educators, law enforcement personnel, youth, parents, and the medical community.
- Targeted collateral development and dissemination.

“Our greatest asset is our ability to spread the news that prescription drug abuse is a problem – this issue hits home with so many people. We encourage and urge all of our constituents to share this knowledge and information with people in their worlds. The dialogue and communication lead to action, and ultimately to saving young lives,” Surks says.

#### **Lessons learned:**

- Use every opportunity to educate the public about teen prescription drug abuse, from the politicians to parents. We all have a role to play.
- While it’s important to talk about prescription and OTC abuse, remember that the interventions for each are slightly different.
- Acknowledge that even the best of educated parents and caregivers may be taken by surprise when it comes to their teens abusing prescription drugs. You have to start from this vantage point – as if parents are totally unaware that this could be a cause of concern.

#### **For more information:**

Linda Surks  
Linda@ncadd-middlesex.org  
<http://www.ncadd-middlesex.org>

## Community Educates Parents, Grandparents, and the Medical Community on How to Curb Prescription Drug Abuse

*“Grandma or grandpa reaches for pain medication and it’s gone – stolen by a family member; a home is invaded and they’re not looking for anything else but the pain pills in the medicine cabinet. We have highly addictive lethal drugs in the homes of unsuspecting legitimate users.”*

**Magisterial District Judge J. Gary DeComo  
Ford City, PA**

Like many communities across the country, rural Armstrong County, PA, was seeing increasingly more cases of teens abusing prescription medications, such as pain relievers. To address this alarming trend, community leaders decided to take their education efforts to parents and grandparents who are prescribed the medications. “Our biggest challenge is that these key players don’t necessarily understand that prescription drugs can be abused, especially when young people get a hold of them,” explains Judge DeComo, a longtime drug abuse prevention advocate who spearheaded the effort.

To address these challenges, prevention and treatment advocates created “Drugs Kill Dreams,” a multi-faceted public awareness campaign that uses the medical community – pharmacists and doctors – to reach its intended audiences. Pharmacists provide anyone who picked up a prescription for a pain reliever a “prescription pain reliever alert” that educates consumers about the increased rates of prescription pain medication abuse, reminds them that it’s a criminal offense to share medication, and offers tips on what they can do to ensure the drugs don’t end up in the wrong hands. The campaign was expanded to include doctors, and DeComo and partner agencies hosted a

seminar on prescription drug abuse. Over 100 pharmacists and doctors attended the event, and there is interest in continuing the dialogue and training.

Additionally, posters placed in pharmacies have tear-off cards with directions on what to do if someone appears to have a prescription drug abuse problem.

The “Drugs Kill Dreams” campaign goes beyond parents and caregivers, providing information to the general public, too. Its billboards are now posted on major highways; posters are placed throughout the community; and literature is handed out at community events. Concludes DeComo, “People I speak with never realized that their unused pain medications could lead to drug addiction and illicit drug abuse. Indeed, prevention is the key. If you increase prevention, you decrease addiction.”

### Lessons learned:

- Put materials directly in the hands of your target audience(s).
- Provide prevention information at the point-of-sale. This strategy helps parents and other adults to connect the dots between practicing “good medicine etiquette” and protecting young people from prescription and illicit drug abuse.
- Provide your target audience with concrete action steps.
- Always ensure that treatment information is coupled with your materials.

### For more information:

Judge Gary DeComo  
Phone: (724) 763-7866  
Fax: (724)763-8821

## CONCLUSIONS

Widespread availability, teen misconceptions, and parental lack of knowledge about risks make prescription drug abuse a challenging but imperative issue for the prevention community. “The time for action is now,” says Becky Carlson, the Coordinator for the Sussex County, NJ, Coalition for Healthy and Safe Families. “My counselors are seeing kids every day who are addicted to illicit drugs and who are also abusing prescription drugs. When the perception of harm is low, as it is with prescription drug abuse, the rate of use is going to go up. This is what’s happening right now, and we need to

sound the alarm before more teens die.”

Coalitions can play a powerful role through education and outreach. This Strategizer arms coalitions with messages and advice to help inform, educate, and implement strategies that will ultimately change beliefs and behaviors. You can be instrumental in saving the lives of thousands of young people, enabling teens like Jay, Sara, and Eddie to experience a safe and healthy adolescence and a fulfilling adulthood.

# Teen Prescription Drug Abuse: An Emerging Threat

## RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU

The following sites and materials provide facts, figures, and resources to help you move forward. From prescription drug abuse resources to general drug prevention tactics, you'll find information that will help you take your efforts from ideas to implementation.

### General Information for Parents and Community Groups

#### Office of National Drug Control Policy's National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign

[www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com)

[www.WhiteHouseDrugPolicy.gov](http://www.WhiteHouseDrugPolicy.gov)

#### Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America

[www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org)

#### National Institute on Drug Abuse

[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

#### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

#### National Clearinghouse for Alcohol & Drug Information

<http://ncadistore.samhsa.gov>

#### SAMHSA's A Family Guide to Keeping Youth Mentally Healthy and Drug-Free

[www.family.samhsa.gov](http://www.family.samhsa.gov)

#### SAMHSA's Prevent Prescription Drug Abuse

[www.samhsa.gov/rxsafety](http://www.samhsa.gov/rxsafety)

#### Especially for Teens

#### Above the Influence

[www.AbovetheInfluence.com](http://www.AbovetheInfluence.com)

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America® (CADCA) is a national membership organization representing coalitions working to make America's communities safe, healthy and drug-free. CADCA provides technical assistance and training, public policy, coalition-specific media strategies, conferences and events. CADCA's National Community Anti-Drug Coalition Institute provides training, technical assistance, evaluation and research to help coalitions reduce substance abuse in their communities.

**PUBLISHED JANUARY 2008**

This *Strategizer* is part of a series of publications designed to provide step-by-step guidance on various topics relevant to the work you do in your community each day. For a current list of Strategizers, visit CADCA's Publications Library at [www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org). For additional technical assistance on the topics covered in this *Strategizer*, or information about membership, conferences and training opportunities, contact the CADCA staff by calling 1-800-54-CADCA.

To reproduce this publication, include the following citation: *This Strategizer was developed by CADCA.*



625 SLATERS LANE, SUITE 300

ALEXANDRIA VA 22314

800-54-CADCA

[membership@cadca.org](mailto:membership@cadca.org)

[training@cadca.org](mailto:training@cadca.org)