



## Commonwealth of Kentucky

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### Op-Ed:

## Prescription Drug Take-Back and Prescription Safety Key in Our Continued Fight Against Opioid Epidemic

*By Cabinet for Health and Family Services Secretary Adam Meier and Justice and Public Safety Cabinet Secretary John Tilley*

Prescription opioids, such as Lortab, Percocet, and OxyContin, are medications that may be prescribed for the treatment of acute pain. Historically, these medications have often been overprescribed and used inappropriately in an effort to manage chronic pain. As a result, prescription opioids continue to line the shelves of our medicine cabinets in abundance.

Over time, we have learned a great deal about the potentially dangerous effects of these medications and their addictive properties. State health officials and policy leaders have worked collaboratively with the medical community to improve pain management while curbing the inappropriate prescribing of opioids.

Yet, the sheer volume of prescription opioids dispensed in Kentucky remains staggering. In 2017, **Kentucky** providers wrote 86.8 **opioid prescriptions** for every 100 people compared to the average U.S. rate of 58.7 (CDC).

Simply put, the amount of prescription opioids in the medicine cabinets of Kentuckians is a threat to our public safety and an unnecessary risk many of us are unknowingly taking. Having a supply of unused pain medications in your home is dangerous because it raises the potential the medications could fall into the wrong hands.

Consider this: In 2017, **50% of those who misused prescription pain relievers in the past year said that they obtained the pain relievers from a friend or relative.** This is in comparison to 35% who obtained their pain reliever from a doctor and 7% who bought from a drug dealer or stranger (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2018).

The good news is there are resources in nearly every county to help people safely get rid of unused medications, including prescription opioids.

Instead of holding onto old medications – or worse flushing them down the toilet and polluting the water supply – you can take your medications to drop-off locations where they'll be picked up and safely disposed of.

These prescription drop boxes are available across Kentucky in conjunction with law enforcement agencies and local governments. There are now 198 locations in 116 counties, with sites being added daily.

Simply visit [www.deatakeback.com](http://www.deatakeback.com) and scroll down to the collection site locator. Type in your ZIP code or other locality information.

Health policy leaders and law enforcement officials feel this is such an important issue – and so critical in our prevention efforts to stem the tide of opioid abuse – two National Drug Take Back days are held in the fall and spring every year.

If you have medications you need to get rid of, we hope you'll join us for the next Drug Take Back Day, which will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, October 26.

Participating in Drug Take Back Day and routinely discarding of medications at drop off locations, helps protect yourself, your family, and your community by preventing misuse of these sometimes dangerous medications.

These events also serve as opportunities for everyone to step outside their homes and onto the frontlines of prevention. If we are going to end the opioid epidemic, our Commonwealth needs the support not only from our policy makers, state leaders, and medical community, but from our friends and neighbors, schools and community organizations, faith-based groups, and business organizations. We need everyone to take action and participate in Drug Take Back, because together we are stronger than opioids.

## **About Drug Take Back Day**

Rates of prescription drug abuse in the United States continue to be alarmingly high, as are the number of accidental poisonings and overdoses due to these drugs. The majority of prescription drug abusers say they get their drugs free from friends and family, including from the home medicine cabinet. Take Back Day is a unique opportunity for Americans to protect their homes and medicine cabinets from theft and abuse.

National Take Back Day has received enthusiastic public support since its inception in 2010. Last October, the public turned in 457 tons (914,236 pounds) of prescription drugs at more than 5,800 sites operated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and nearly 4,800 of its local partners.