

# Fighting an Epidemic

## COMBATING PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE AND DIVERSION

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Our nation's prescription opioid abuse epidemic is a complex healthcare challenge that poses a serious, long-term threat to patient safety. Pharmaceutical distributors are committed to working collaboratively to bring stakeholders together to tackle this public health crisis.



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As logistics experts, distributors ensure the safe, secure and efficient delivery of all prescription medicines and healthcare products to pharmacies, hospitals and other licensed dispensers every day. While distributors do not prescribe, dispense, market or manufacture prescription opioids, they do coordinate with a range of supply chain partners, as well as federal and state regulatory agencies, to help prevent the diversion of prescription drugs. Among other safeguards, distributors are dedicated to keeping prescription painkillers out of the hands of people who may use them for purposes other than those for which they are intended. To help address this threat, distributors support aggressive policy measures to reduce overprescribing of opioids and to prevent abuse and misuse before it happens.

**Pharmaceutical distributors work with a broad range of stakeholders across the supply chain and health system to ensure patients with legitimate pain needs receive the medicines they require while mitigating the prevalence of opioid abuse and misuse on several fronts:**

- Our member distributors register with the DEA and follow rigorous statutory and regulatory requirements for the storage, handling and distribution of controlled substances. These sophisticated security systems and processes help safeguard the supply chain. HDA members work collaboratively with the DEA, law enforcement and regulators to combat diversion, offering information technology, security and logistics expertise that helps locate and prosecute those who attempt to misuse and abuse prescription drugs.
- HDA-member distributors must report sales of opioid controlled substances to DEA's Automation of Reports and Consolidated Orders System (ARCOS).<sup>\*</sup> This system monitors the flow of opioid controlled substances, from the point of manufacturing through commercial distribution to delivery to DEA- and state-regulated pharmacies, hospitals and other retailers.

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<sup>\*</sup> Except the few opioid products that are controlled in Schedule IV or V.

**Pharmaceutical distributors work to educate suppliers, customers, policymakers and communities about our industry's efforts to help prevent prescription drug abuse and diversion.**

- As an industry, HDA and our members are advocating for practical solutions to address opioid abuse and misuse. These include: enhancing coordination, data sharing and monitoring; educating patients, families and caregivers; using data and technology to prevent diversion and abuse; and, ensuring appropriate access to safe and effective treatments.
- HDA's collaborative efforts to mitigate this issue include founding Allied Against Opioid Abuse (AAOA), a national education and awareness initiative to help prevent the abuse and misuse of opioids.
- Since 2014, HDA has collaborated with the Georgia Attorney General's "We're Not Gonna Take It" video contest with high school students, highlighting the risks of prescription drug abuse among teens. Through HDA's support, winning videos were aired on TV stations throughout the state of Georgia.
- Our members also have launched programs and are engaged in other initiatives to address the epidemic.
- A comprehensive bipartisan law enacted in 2018, The SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act included HDA-supported provisions that will enhance data sharing and coordination among pharmaceutical distributors, regulators and law enforcement, while providing broader access to certain information in the DEA ARCOS database. Further, the law establishes a centralized database for suspicious order reporting that provides information to the states for additional investigation and enforcement.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

**CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES**

are drugs that are regulated by federal and state laws to help control addiction and abuse, other physical harm or illegal trafficking.

Certain controlled substances only can be prescribed by a physician. As mandated by the Controlled Substances Act, drugs and other substances that are considered "controlled substances" in the U.S. are divided into five different schedules. These schedules are based on the substance's potential for abuse and the likelihood that the drug will lead to dependence when abused, in contrast to non-controlled substances, which have a decreased chance of being abused by individuals.