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Many States Lack Effective Strategies Against Prescription Drug Abuse

A new report finds many states do not have effective strategies in place to fight prescription drug abuse, CNN reports.

The report found 28 states and Washington, D.C. scored six or less out of 10 possible indicators of promising strategies.

Only New Mexico and Vermont scored 10 out of 10, according to the report, "Prescription Drug Abuse: Strategies to Stop the Epidemic." The report was written by the nonprofit group Trust for America's Health (TFAH).

The number of drug overdose deaths, a majority of them from prescription drugs, doubled in 29 states since 1999, the report notes. Deaths related to prescription drugs now outnumber those from heroin and cocaine combined. The report also found drug overdose deaths now outnumber motor-vehicle deaths in 29 states.

The report evaluated strategies such as prescription drug monitoring programs, which help doctors and pharmacists identify patients who are "doctor shopping" for prescriptions. The report found while 49 of 50 states have such programs, only 16 require medical providers to use them.

Only 17 states and Washington, D.C. allow the general population to access and administer naloxone, an opioid overdose antidote. Fewer than half of states have enacted laws requiring special education for medical providers who prescribe painkillers.

"Prescription drugs can be a miracle for many, but misuse can have dire consequences. The rapid rise of abuse requires nothing short of a full-scale response—starting with prevention and education all the way through to expanding and modernizing treatment," Jeffrey Levi, PhD, Executive Director of TFAH, said in a news release. "There are many promising signs that we can turn this around—but it requires urgent action."

Prescription drugs are the third most commonly abused category of drugs, behind alcohol

and marijuana and ahead of cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. To learn more, please click here.