

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS



COLORADO PRESCRIPTION DRUG MONITORING PROGRAM
PERFORMANCE AUDIT, MARCH 2021

DEPARTMENT OF
REGULATORY AGENCIES

KEY CONCERN

The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP), within the Department of Regulatory Agencies (Department), is not operating as effectively as members of the General Assembly intended to help improve patient care, detect illegal activity, and prevent prescription drug abuse or misuse in Colorado, in accordance with the program's statutory purpose.

KEY FINDINGS

- Since the PDMP has been in place, recorded overdose deaths from prescription opioids rose significantly in Colorado, from 246 deaths in 2008 to 433 deaths in 2019.
- In 2018 and 2019, PDMP data showed 8,700 patients in Colorado with prescription histories that indicated doctor shopping for opioids because they each received one or more opioid prescriptions from 10 or more prescribers, which is nearly 10 times the average. For example, 20 patients got an average of 73 opioid prescriptions from at least 25 different doctors and 10 different pharmacies. Yet, the PDMP does not refer such patients to law enforcement.
- The State does not use PDMP data to identify and address overprescribing, although PDMP data showed 85 Colorado medical professionals who each prescribed more than 3,000 opioids in Calendar Years 2018 and 2019, which was 26 times the number of opioids as the average prescriber. Most of the 85 prescribers were in family medicine, internal medicine, and nurse practitioners, and their prescribing trends indicate “pill mills,” or the prescribing of more opioids than patients need.
- 18 percent of Colorado's 34,679 prescribers were not registered to use the PDMP database, as statute requires, which may hamper their ability to provide quality care and ensure patients receive safe amounts of opioids. The PDMP also does not track whether prescribers query the database before issuing a second opioid prescription to a patient, as statute requires, so it is unclear whether prescribers comply.
- Most pharmacies did not submit prescription data to the PDMP within 1 business day, as rules require. Colorado pharmacies submitted about 5.5 million prescriptions (35 percent) an average of 6 business days late. When pharmacies are untimely submitting data, the PDMP database is not an accurate and complete tool that prescribers can use to monitor their patients' prescription histories.

BACKGROUND

- Each state has a PDMP to help combat the misuse, abuse, and diversion of controlled substance prescription drugs, like opioids.
- In 2008, Colorado's PDMP was created to electronically track and monitor prescriptions to help prevent their misuse, allow prescribers to review their patients' prescription histories, and help law enforcement and regulatory boards investigate potentially harmful prescribers.
- Since 2014, statute has required Colorado pharmacists to submit data on all dispensed controlled substances to the PDMP database, and has required Colorado prescribers and pharmacists to query the PDMP database to help monitor prescription drug use.
- The State Pharmacy Board regulates Colorado pharmacies, sets rules related to the PDMP, and issues best practice guidance for PDMP database users.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve the effectiveness of the PDMP by working with the General Assembly on statutory changes that would require prescribers to query the PDMP database before prescribing each opioid.
- Enforce the requirements that prescribers and pharmacists register to use and query the PDMP database.
- Enforce statutory limits on opioid prescriptions and develop enforcement mechanisms for noncompliant prescribers.
- Ensure pharmacies comply with rules to timely submit data on prescriptions to the PDMP database.

The Department of Regulatory Agencies agreed with the audit recommendations.