



# OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Greg Fugate  
osa.media@state.co.us

DIANNE E. RAY, CPA  
STATE AUDITOR

June 21, 2021

### **Audit Reveals Serious Problems with State Prescription Drug Program Designed to Help Prevent Prescription Drug Abuse and Misuse**

DENVER—A new performance audit by the Office of the State Auditor (OSA) of Colorado’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) within the Department of Regulatory Agencies (Department) found that the PDMP has not prevented patients from obtaining large amounts of opioid prescriptions, as intended. In more than 10 years since the PDMP has been in place, recorded overdose deaths from prescription opioids rose significantly in Colorado, from 246 deaths in 2008 to 433 in 2019 (76 percent), and they remain the most frequent type of drug overdose deaths in the state.

Colorado’s PDMP was created in 2008 to track and monitor statewide data on certain prescriptions dispensed by Colorado pharmacies and help inform prescribers and pharmacists of patients’ prescription histories, thereby combatting the misuse, abuse, and diversion of certain prescription drugs. However, the audit identified 8,700 patients in Colorado with prescription histories that indicated “doctor shopping” for opioids because the patients each received at least one opioid prescription from 10 or more prescribers in 2018 and 2019, 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. One patient got 154 opioid prescriptions from 55 different prescribers and 21 different pharmacies over these 2 years.

Auditors identified patients who appear to be misusing or abusing opioid prescriptions based on the high number of prescriptions they received. For

OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR  
1525 SHERMAN STREET  
7TH FLOOR  
DENVER, 80203  
COLORADO

303.869.2800

example, the audit identified 20 patients who, on average, received 139 prescriptions for a 1,514 day supply of opioids over the 2-year period. One patient received 274 prescriptions for a 1,602 day supply.

Auditors' analysis of PDMP data also showed 85 Colorado medical professionals who each prescribed more than 3,000 opioids in 2018 and 2019, which was 26 times the number of opioids as the average prescriber. Yet, the PDMP did not identify and follow-up on such trends, or make referrals to law enforcement or regulatory boards.

Additionally, auditors found that 18 percent of Colorado's approximately 35,000 prescribers were not registered to use the PDMP database, as required by statute, and that most pharmacies did not submit prescription data to the PDMP database within required timeframes. Lack of complete participation by prescribers and untimely data submission by pharmacies limit the PDMP database's usefulness in monitoring prescription drug use.

"The General Assembly established the PDMP to help improve patient care, detect illegal activity, and prevent prescription drug abuse and misuse. Unfortunately, this audit showed that the program is not working as it should to achieve these goals," said Kate Shiroff, Legislative Audit Supervisor.

The audit makes five recommendations to improve PDMP operations, the usefulness of the PDMP database, and oversight by the Department and the State Pharmacy Board. The full report is available online at [www.colorado.gov/auditor](http://www.colorado.gov/auditor).

#### **About the Office of the State Auditor (OSA)**

Under the direction of the State Auditor, the OSA is the State's nonpartisan, independent external auditor with broad authority to audit state agencies, departments, institutions of higher education, and the Judicial and Legislative Branches. The OSA also conducts evaluations of the State's tax expenditures (e.g., credits, exemptions, deductions) established in statute, administers a fraud reporting hotline, and tracks about 4,000 Colorado local governments for compliance with the Local Government Audit Law. The OSA's professional staff serve the people of Colorado by addressing relevant public issues through high-quality, objective audits, evaluations, and other work products that promote accountability and positive change in government.

####