

# Fighting an Epidemic

## COMBATING PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE AND DIVERSION

Our nation's prescription drug abuse and diversion epidemic is a serious healthcare challenge that threatens both patient safety and the security of the healthcare supply chain. At the center of that supply chain, the Healthcare Distribution Alliance (HDA) and our primary pharmaceutical distributor members are committed to working collaboratively to bring stakeholders together to tackle this complex national crisis.



While distributors do not prescribe or dispense drugs directly to patients, they do share a common goal with doctors, manufacturers, pharmacists, law enforcement officials and policymakers: to ensure a safe supply of medicines. 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 growing threat, HDA and its member companies support and employ a multilayered approach:

### **Pharmaceutical distributors work to ensure that healthcare providers receive the medically necessary medicines to treat their patients and improve public health.**

- HDA is committed to our core mission of helping to protect patient safety and access to medicines, while creating efficiencies in the healthcare supply chain.
- We work with manufacturers, pharmacies, hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and other healthcare providers to provide the appropriate inventory levels of the medications and products that patients need every day.
- 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.

### **Pharmaceutical distributors coordinate with a range of supply chain partners, as well as federal and state regulatory agencies, to help prevent the diversion of prescription drugs.**

- We work with supply chain stakeholders, including pharmaceutical manufacturers, hospitals, retail pharmacies and other healthcare providers, to share information and develop strategies to identify and help prevent abuse and diversion.
- We work collaboratively with law enforcement and regulators to combat bad actors who attempt to breach the security of the legitimate supply chain, coordinating with law enforcement and regulators to offer deep information technology, security and logistics expertise that helps locate and prosecute bad actors who attempt to misuse and divert prescription drugs from the legitimate supply chain.
- We take steps to "know our customers," including actively assessing and reviewing purchases from pharmacies and healthcare providers that order controlled substances to monitor and report to the DEA if a customer's controlled substances volume or pattern of ordering might signal inappropriate use of the

product. If inappropriate use is suspected, distributors work proactively with the DEA, local law enforcement and others to help in the investigation of potential diversion cases.

- We provide the DEA with additional data and reports to aid their efforts to seek out criminal behavior. Distributors communicate about any handling of selected controlled substances to the DEA's reporting system, Automation of Reports and Consolidated Orders System (ARCOS). This system monitors the flow of DEA controlled substances from their point of manufacture through commercial distribution channels to the point of sale at the dispensing/retail level.

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

- We are committed to being a part of the national dialogue on prescription drug abuse and will continue to participate in national, state and local forums to educate, raise awareness of and advance solutions to prescription drug abuse and diversion.
- HDA's collaborative efforts to mitigate this issue include work with the National Governors Association's Prescription Drug Abuse Project, The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids initiative "The Medicine Abuse Project," the Alliance to Prevent the Abuse of Medicines and the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA).
- In 2014, 2015 and 2016 HDA also collaborated with Georgia Attorney General Sam Olens' "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, the winning videos were aired on TV stations throughout the state of Georgia.

**F**or more than two years, HDA worked closely with members of Congress to help enact the Ensuring Patient Access and Effective Drug Enforcement Act of 2016 (PL 114-145, S. 483). Based on ideas initially conceived by HDA and its members, the law further strengthens the relationship between pharmaceutical supply chain stakeholders and the DEA, enhancing collaboration in the fight against prescription drug abuse. It was the first significant legislation passed in the 114th Congress to address this complex issue.

**DID YOU KNOW?**



**CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES** are drugs that are regulated by federal or 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.