Checking our pulse is essential in monitoring our Vital Signs. The Pulse highlights a specific indicator of human well-being that is contained in United Way of Central Oklahoma’s Vital Signs report or is being noticed through United Way’s work in the community.

As of 2015, more than four out of five prescription-related overdose deaths in Oklahoma involved opioids like oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, fentanyl, Demerol, and/or Lortab.\(^1\) Sadly, Oklahoma ranks sixth highest in the nation for nonmedical use of prescription drugs among youth ages 12 to 17 years.\(^2\) In this issue of the Pulse, we focus our attention on how dramatic increases in prescriptions, coupled with social acceptance of opioid medications, is leading to the opioid epidemic among Oklahoma youth. We also provide best practice solutions that are available in central Oklahoma to meet this growing priority need.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Opioids**\(^3\) – also known generically as prescription ‘painkillers’ or ‘pain relievers’ are natural or synthetic chemicals that reduce feelings of pain by blocking receptors in the brain.\(^3\) This includes heroin and the prescription pain relievers morphine, hydrocodone, oxycodone, codeine, fentanyl, Demerol and Lortab.

**Misuse**\(^5\)

- Taking a prescription in a different way than your doctor prescribed.
  
  * Ex: taking a higher dose or taking it more often, mixing medications with alcohol or other drugs, snorting or injecting crushed pills, etc.
- Taking a prescription that is not yours, even for a medical reason.
- Taking a medication to get high.

**Addiction**\(^6\) – a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences.
In the United States in 2015 ... over 33,000 people died due to opioid-related overdose— the highest year on record. Almost 50% of opioid overdose deaths were due at least in part to a prescription opioid.  

In Oklahoma as of 2015 ...  
7 out of 10 unintentional poisoning deaths include prescription drugs.  

Opioids are the #1 drug involved in unintentional overdose deaths in Oklahoma  
- Hydrocodone and oxycodone are involved in more overdose deaths than methamphetamines, cocaine, and heroin combined.  

Misuse of prescription drugs before the age of 13 significantly increases risk of prescription drug abuse and dependence later in life.  

RISK FACTORS FOR YOUTH SUBSTANCE ABUSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community factors</th>
<th>Availability; low neighborhood attachment; community disorganization; and extreme economic and social deprivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td>Family history; family conflict; and favorable parent attitudes and involvement in the problem behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School factors</td>
<td>Academic failure and lack of commitment to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer/ individual factors</td>
<td>Early initiation of drug use; early and persistent antisocial behavior; friends who use drugs; and gang involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6th grade — friends, followed by doctor/pharmacy and then by family/relatives
8th grade — friends, followed by home (e.g. medicine cabinet) and then at parties
10th grade — friends, followed by parties and home (e.g. medicine cabinet)
12th grade — friends, followed by parties and then by home (e.g. medicine cabinet)
Oklahoma County had one of the highest opioid prescription rates in Oklahoma in 2015.

Although the amount of pain Americans report has not changed since 1999, the amount of opioids prescribed was three times higher in 2015 compared to 1999.

Unfinished opioid prescriptions are often available in home medicine cabinets.

Oklahoma ranked 5th for prescribing rate of opioids in 2012 and 8th for high-dose opioids.

Oklahoma County had one of the highest opioid prescription rates in Oklahoma in 2015.

Opioid overdose symptoms can occur with medical or nonmedical use.

Know the symptoms:

- Won’t awaken when aroused
- Bluish purple skin tones for lighter skinned people or grayish or ashen tones for darker skinned people
- Slow, shallow, erratic or absent breathing
- Snore-like gurgling or choking sounds
- Pinpoint pupils

In the event of an overdose emergency:

Call 9-1-1 and give naloxone, an over-the-counter medication used to reverse the effects of emergency opioid overdose. If no reaction in three minutes, give second naloxone dose.

Do rescue breathing. Follow dispatcher instructions.

Stay with the person until help arrives.

Naloxone wears off. A person who has overdosed may experience symptoms again. Always also seek emergency care.
## PROTECTIVE FACTORS AGAINST YOUTH SUBSTANCE ABUSE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community factors</th>
<th>Opportunities for social involvement (e.g. sports league participation, leadership development programs, etc.).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family factors</td>
<td>Family attachment; given responsibilities and participate in meaningful family activities; and rewarded through praise, encouragement and attention when things are done well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School factors</td>
<td>Opportunities for social involvement (i.e. meaningful participation in important school activities) and recognized and rewarded for those contributions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer/ individual factors</td>
<td>Have a moral code (i.e. what is right or wrong) and associate with peers who engage in positive social behaviors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### SAFE USE
- Tell your healthcare provider all medications and supplements you are taking.
- Do not take more medicine or take medicine more often than instructed.
- Never mix opioids with alcohol, benzodiazepines, sleeping pills or any illicit substance.

### SAFE STORAGE
- Store prescription opioids in a secure place, such as a locked medicine cabinet.

### SAFE DISPOSAL
- Dispose of medications promptly and properly.
- NEVER flush them down the toilet!
- CALL 2-1-1 to find your nearest FREE disposal site.

## CONCERNED ABOUT ADDICTION OR OVERDOSE FOR YOURSELF OR A LOVED ONE?

National Helpline 1-800-662-HELP

Call 2-1-1 or go to takeasprescribed.org

Naloxone is available and FREE in locations throughout the OKC metro and surrounding areas, go to takeasprescribed.org to find a location near you.

## VOLUNTEER REVIEWERS:
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The Pulse is a product of Vital Signs; Oklahoma’s only broad-based community evaluation with over two decades of trend data in five key areas important to our quality of life.

NOTES AND CITATIONS


* Numbers are not mutually exclusive – decedents may have died of an overdose from both prescription and illicit drugs. These individuals are counted in both categories.

** Illicit drugs includes methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and/or PCP.