

Public Opinion of Prescription Drug Abuse and Disposal

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Report based on a public opinion survey
conducted through Morning Consult.



Introduction

Prescription drug abuse is a growing problem in the United States, affecting millions of American families each year. To gain a better understanding of Americans' personal experiences and views of prescription drug abuse, CVS Health® and Morning Consult conducted a public opinion poll in March 2017 of 2,000 registered voters representative of the American electorate.

The poll explored general perceptions on prescription drug abuse, the degree to which respondents had personally been impacted, how they dispose of their medications, and their thoughts on several strategies to prevent and mitigate the epidemic. The following report details key insights.

People in the United States take a lot of prescription medications. In fact, the majority of Americans has prescription medications in their homes.

About two-thirds of respondents take prescription medications, with nearly half taking between three and six prescription medications.

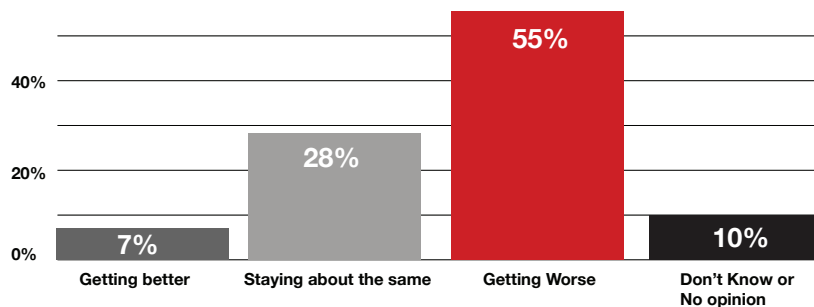
- Use increased with age: Thirty-seven percent of respondents ages 18-29 reported taking prescription medications, compared with 84 percent of respondents 65 and older.
- Gender also showed variation: More women than men reported taking prescription medications (67 vs. 56 percent). But, men were more likely to take more drugs: half of men reported taking three to six prescription medications (51 percent) compared with 46 percent of women.

At the same time, Americans are aware of and highly concerned about prescription drug abuse — a problem many see as getting worse in the United States.

In the last six months, nearly 75 percent of respondents said they had seen, read or heard about prescription drug abuse. People are not only hearing about prescription drug abuse in the news, but they are also concerned about the issue: nearly 90 percent of people said prescription drug abuse is a very or somewhat serious problem. Additionally, more than half of those surveyed said it is a problem that is getting worse, while only seven percent of respondents saw the problem as getting better (Figure 1).

Figure 1: In your opinion, is the prescription drug problem getting better or worse?

Over half of voters say the problem of prescription drug abuse is getting worse.



About

2/3

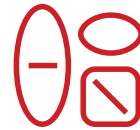
of respondents take prescription medications.



Nearly

90%

of people said prescription drug abuse is a very or somewhat serious problem.



Over

1/2

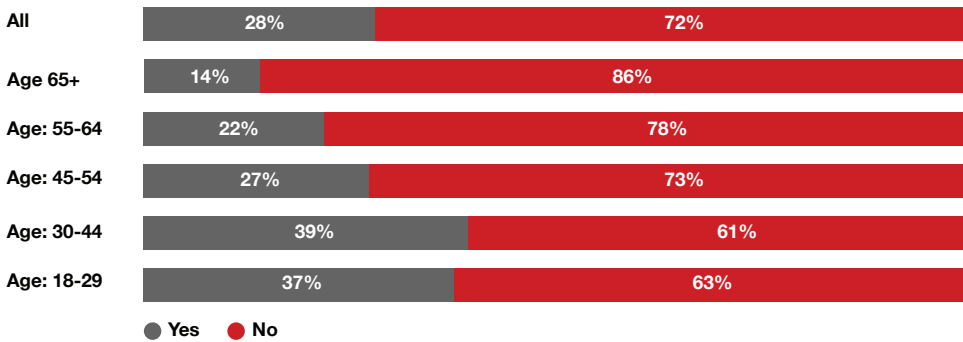
of voters say the problem of prescription drug abuse is getting worse.

Prescription drug abuse is a personal issue for many, and one that has gotten even more personal over time.

Nearly one in three people surveyed reported being personally impacted by the issue of prescription drug abuse (Figure 2). As age increased, the likelihood of being impacted decreased: 38 percent of 18-44 year olds were personally impacted, compared with just 14 percent of respondents aged 65 and older.

Figure 2: Have you, or someone you know, been personally impacted by the issue of prescription drug abuse?

Voters under the age of 45 are most likely to have, or know someone who has, been personally impacted by the issue of prescription drug abuse.



Nearly

1/3

of people surveyed reported being personally impacted by the issue of prescription drug abuse.



More than

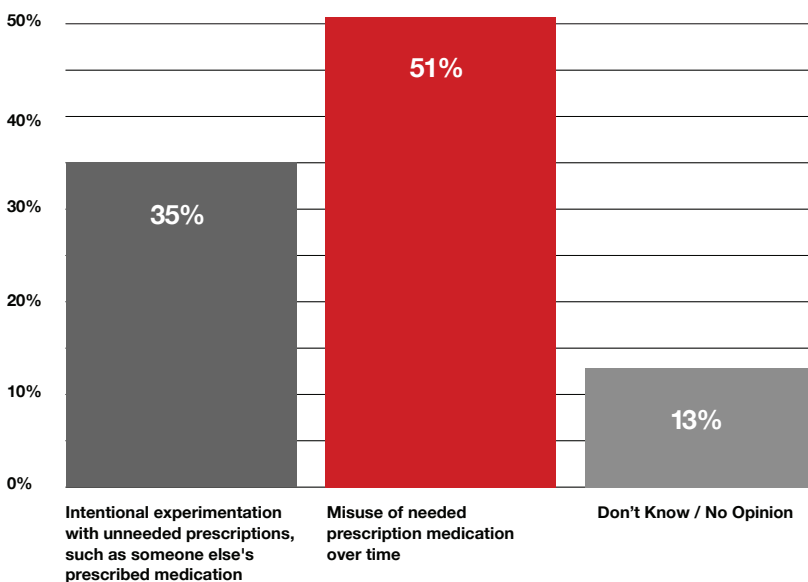
50%

of people thought prescription drug abuse was a result of misuse of a needed medication over time.

When asked to consider the root cause of prescription drug abuse among people they know, more than half of people surveyed said that, to the best of their knowledge (Figure 3), it was a result of misuse of a needed prescription medication over time. In comparison, 35 percent said it was a result of intentional experimentation with unneeded prescriptions.

Figure 3: To the best of your knowledge, what was the prescription drug abuse you were personally impacted by the result of?

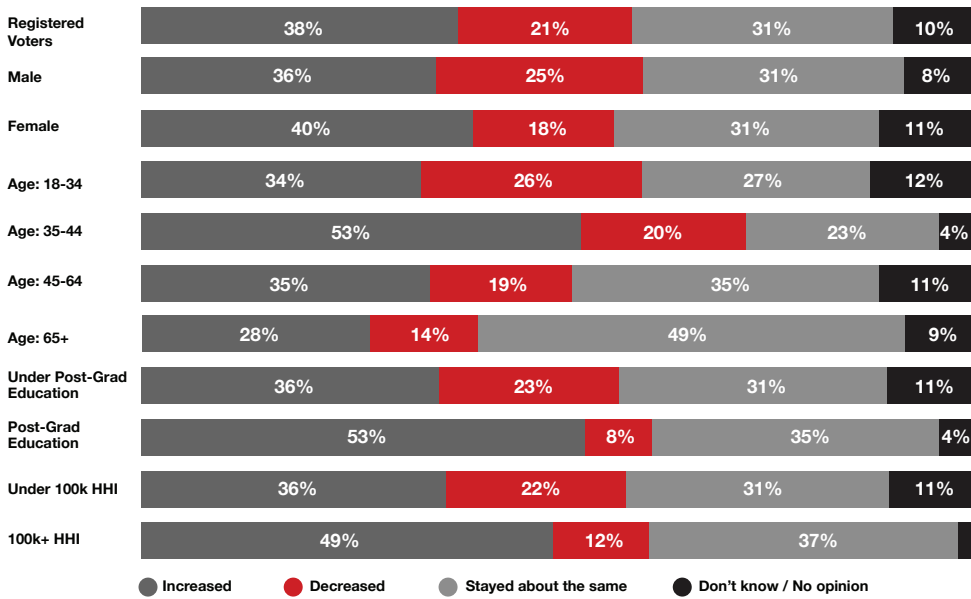
Half of voters say that prescription drug abuse in their experience was the result of misuse of a needed medication over time.



The personal impact of prescription drug abuse is also a problem people categorically see as getting worse. Nearly 40 percent of respondents said the number of people they know who have been personally impacted by the issue of prescription drug abuse has increased in the last year, and this proportion was higher for voters age 30-44 (49 percent), respondents with a post-graduate education (53 percent) and for respondents who made more than \$100,000 annually (49 percent) (Figure 4). Conversely, just 21 percent of respondents said the number of people they knew who have been affected by prescription drug abuse decreased.

Figure 4: In the past year, has the number of people that you know who have been personally impacted by the issue of prescription drug abuse increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?

Voters with post-graduate education and household incomes over \$100k are more likely to have seen the number of people they know personally impacted by prescription drug abuse increase.



Most believe this problem is partially rooted in the availability of unsecured prescription drugs belonging to others.

The availability of prescription drugs in the home was cited as a contributing factor to misuse and abuse of these medications. In fact, 75 percent of respondents said they believed the majority or some of the problem of prescription drug abuse is tied to people who take medications prescribed for someone else, such as a friend or family member.

When asked to think about the availability of prescription medications in their own homes, nearly one in three people reported they had unused prescription medications that they or a family member are no longer taking. Further, nearly half of respondents said they were very or somewhat concerned about the potential that unused medication in their home could be abused or misused by a family member or guest. This concern was anchored in personal experience for some: one in five surveyed said they or someone they know has had prescription medication stolen from their home.



75%

of respondents said prescription drug abuse is tied to people who take medications prescribed for someone else.



Nearly

1/3

of people reported they had unused prescription medications that they or a family member are no longer taking.



Nearly

1/5

of those surveyed said they or someone they know has had prescription medication stolen from their home.

Americans are also concerned about the environmental hazards of improper medication disposal.

In addition to concerns about misuse and abuse, respondents also recognized the environmental hazards of improper medication disposal. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed said they were somewhat or very concerned about the potential impact on the environment of throwing medications in the trash. An even greater portion of respondents – nearly 75 percent – said they were very or somewhat concerned about the impact on drinking water of throwing medication in the trash.

However, Americans are generally not disposing of unwanted or unused prescription medications properly.

Of those surveyed, 43 percent of respondents said they have thrown unused or expired medications in the trash (in or out of the original container), more than any other method indicated in the survey (Figure 5). By comparison, fewer people reported using recommended methods for safe disposal:

- 30 percent reported that they have taken medications to a specific organization or facility for disposal;
- 26 percent said they have brought these medications to a community drug take-back event;
- 18 percent said they have mixed these drugs in with another product and thrown them in the trash; and,
- 16 percent said they have used a home drug disposal pouch.



More than **40%**

of respondents have thrown unused or expired medication in the trash.

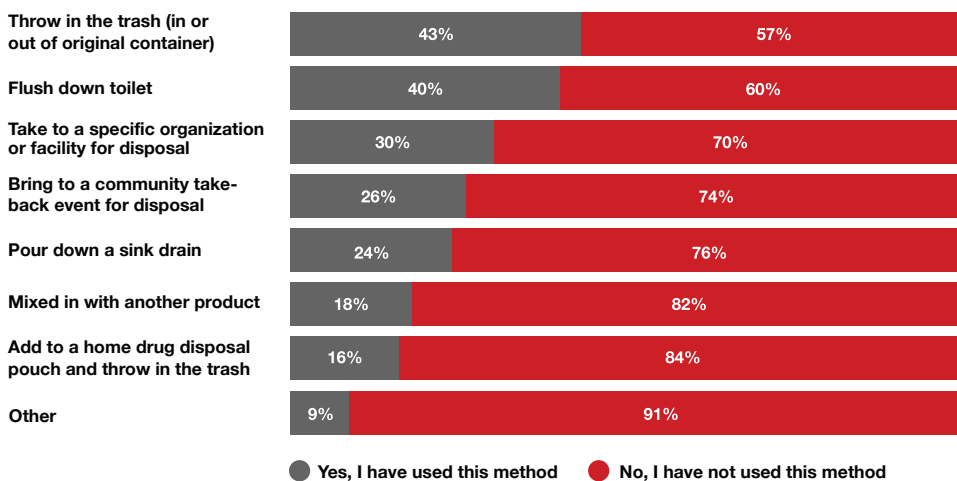


Nearly **3/4**

of respondents said they were concerned about the impact on drinking water of throwing medication in the trash.

Figure 5: Which, if any, of the following methods have you used to dispose of unwanted, unused or expired medications?

Respondents are most likely to dispose of medications in the trash or by flushing them down the toilet.



The good news is there is strong interest in using proper disposal methods for prescription medications in the future.

Proper drug disposal is an important part of helping to prevent prescription drug misuse and abuse. When asked to consider using various methods of safe disposal, 70 percent of people said they were very or somewhat likely to use conveniently located disposal boxes to safely get rid of unwanted medication. More than half of respondents said they were very or somewhat likely to use envelopes with pre-paid postage to safely dispose of unwanted medication in the mail, and a similar portion said they were very or somewhat likely to use a collection service whereby a certified professional will pick up prescription medications at an individual residence.

Community take-back events allow people to voluntarily and anonymously drop-off their medications on a specific day and location in their communities. Of those surveyed, nearly two-thirds said they were very or somewhat likely to get rid of unwanted medication at a local drug take-back event, reinforcing the value these events hold nationwide for encouraging safe drug disposal.

And, there is support from a majority of voters for a number of strategies to address prescription drug abuse.

Nearly 70 percent of respondents thought increasing disposal sites, as well as local drug take-back events, would be very or somewhat effective in addressing prescription drug abuse. Beyond disposal methods, more than half thought making naloxone (also known as Narcan, a drug that can reverse the side effects of an opioid overdose) available without a prescription would be very or somewhat effective. Additionally, nearly three in four thought expanded drug education efforts for teens, parents and aging populations would be very or somewhat effective to address the problem.

There's more to be done.

According to respondents in the survey, prescription drug abuse is a serious problem that impacts many on a personal level. In addition to being concerned, people are interested in and supportive of potential solutions, such as safe disposal programs and drug education efforts.

CVS Health is committed to helping prevent prescription drug abuse across a number of efforts. CVS has worked to expand access to naloxone without an individual prescription, reaching 43 states as of September 2017. Additionally, CVS Health has developed recommendations for Prescription Drug Monitoring Program improvements to empower prescribers and pharmacists to identify improper prescribing and potential misuse. Through the Pharmacists Teach program, CVS Health has worked to prevent teen drug abuse and has reached nearly 300,000 high school students to date. CVS Health has also supported community efforts to safely dispose of unwanted or unused prescription drugs year-round through Medication Disposal for Safer Communities, donating more than 800 disposal units that have collected more than 100 metric tons of unwanted medication to date.

For more information on how CVS Health is working to help address and prevent prescription drug abuse, visit:
cvshealth.com/thought-leadership/prescription-drug-abuse.



Nearly

300K

Number of students who have participated in the CVS Health Pharmacists Teach program.



800

Number of safe medication disposal units donated by CVS Health.



100

Number of metric tons collected in drug disposal units donated to local law enforcement by CVS Health.
