



# Department of Justice

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**SUMMIT ADDRESSES PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE EPIDEMIC**

Richard S. Hartunian, United States Attorney for the Northern District of New York, announces that a “New York Rx Summit” is occurring today at the New York State Police Academy in Albany. The Summit was convened by the United States Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of New York, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Middle Atlantic Great Lakes Organized Crime Law Enforcement Network, the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, New York State Police, and the New York State Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement, in cooperation with the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators, and Purdue Pharma L.P., to address the prescription drug abuse crisis.

The Summit brings together leaders and experts in public health, law enforcement, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, and education to consider the nature and scope of the problem and strategies to address it. The keynote speech, “Epidemic: Responding to America’s Prescription Drug Crisis,” is being delivered by Dr. Timothy Condon, Science Policy Advisor for the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). Training on combating the diversion of prescription drugs for illegitimate use was provided by the National Association of Drug Diversion Investigators and others yesterday at the New York State Police Academy.

Prescription drug abuse is the fastest-growing drug problem in the United States. The 2009 *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (accomplished by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) showed that:

- 52 million Americans age 12 and over had used prescription drugs non-medically in their lifetime;
- 2.6 million Americans age 12 and over had used prescription drugs non-medically for the first time within the past year, which averages out to around 7,000 initiates per day; and
- Over 70 percent of those who had used pain relievers non-medically in the past month had gotten them from a friend or relative.

The 2009 *National Youth Risk Behavior Survey* by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that one in five high school students in the United States had taken a prescription drug without a doctor's prescription. Another SAMHSA study (*Substance Abuse Treatment Admissions Involving Abuse of Pain Relievers: 1998 and 2008*) found that between 1998 and 2008, there was a 400% increase in hospital admissions involving prescription drug abuse. Too often, prescription drug abuse is deadly. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention found that between 1999 and 2004, prescription drugs accounted for more lethal overdoses than heroin and cocaine combined.

The most dramatic increases in prescription drug abuse involve opioid pain relievers. These potent medications may be properly prescribed to relieve suffering, but they have great potential for abuse. The Administration's national Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan endeavors to diminish abuse and maintain access to pain relievers for legitimate use. The plan to reduce prescription drug abuse includes:

1. Education of parents, youth, patients, and health care providers regarding the dangers of the misuse and abuse of prescription drugs;
2. Enhancement and increased utilization of prescription drug monitoring programs;

3. Collection and proper disposal of unused, unneeded, and expired medications; and
4. Aggressive enforcement actions against those who prescribe drugs for illegitimate purposes or obtain prescription drugs for illegitimate use. The National Drug Control Strategy includes a five year goal of reducing by 15 percent the non-medical use of prescription drugs and reducing by 15 percent the number of unintentional overdose deaths related to opioids.

United States Attorney Hartunian said: “The professionals in public health and public safety gathering here today are working hard to reduce prescription drug abuse. Parents also are critical partners in this effort. We urge parents to take the following steps:

- Ensure that prescribed drugs are used only by the person and in the way directed;
- Talk to your kids regarding the use and abuse of prescription drugs;
- Learn to spot risk factors that can lead to drug use, such as problems with school work or classroom behavior, or association with people who abuse drugs;
- Go through your medicine cabinet and follow the guidelines for disposing of unused, unneeded, and expired medications;
- Take advantage of community take-back programs; and
- Seek treatment for those who need help with prescription drug abuse and support them in recovery.

Parents can protect their children by explaining that drug abuse is harmful, communicating clearly disapproval of drug abuse, maintaining control over prescription medications at home, and protecting children from bad influences by staying involved in their lives and setting and enforcing clear limits. Working together, we can reduce the risk of harm to our children and save lives.”

Further questions or inquiries may be directed to First Assistant U.S. Attorney Grant C. Jaquith or Executive Assistant U.S. Attorney John G. Duncan at (518) 431-0247.