

# Envision | Issue Statement Paper

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## Issue and Topic

Prescription Drug Abuse

## Background on the Issue

- Prescription Drug Addiction kills more people than car accidents each year
- Abuse has doubled over the last decade
- Classified by the CDC as an epidemic
- America has the most cases of abuse/addiction
- More than 6.5 million people over the age of 11 used prescription drugs for non medical purposes in 2013
- This is more than cocaine, hallucinogens, and heroin combined
- Most common prescribed drugs are opioids, antidepressants, and antibiotics
- Elderly citizens are the largest abusers of prescription drugs
- From 2002-2012, the number of seniors dependent on prescription painkillers rose up to 336,000, an increase of 132,000
- Over half of the people (12 and older) who abused prescriptions in 2012-2013 received drugs from friends or family members for free
- In 2010, one out of every five high school students abused some kind of prescription drug
- Mostly the abused drugs are painkillers
- **Causes death by overdose**
- **Linked to choking, changes in mood, infertility, slowed breathing, paranoia, high body temperature and abnormal heartbeat, greater risk of accidents, and poor academic performance**
- [www.ulifeline.org/articles/390-the-dangers-of-misuse-prescription-drugs](http://www.ulifeline.org/articles/390-the-dangers-of-misuse-prescription-drugs)
- <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-records/misuse-prescription-drugs/summary>
- Increases emergency room visits

- <https://www.drugwatch.com/2015/07/29/drug-abuse-in-america/>

## Problem Statement

The debate on laws around drugs and the war on the drug trade are coming to a close. The sale of marijuana, crack, cocaine, and heroin has declined over recent years. Marijuana is slowly becoming available for recreational use around the country and by 2020 will most likely be nationally legal. However, a blind eye has been turned to the real problem because drug addiction still exists and is more prominent than ever. Prescription drug abuse has doubled over the last decade and is officially classified by the CDC as an epidemic. The war on drugs is far from over and will not end until we address the real problem.

In order to solve the problem, we first need to state the problem. Prescription drugs, especially opioids, antidepressants, antibiotics, and painkillers have become the most used and abused drugs. Over 6.5 million people over the age of 11 misused prescription drugs, more than cocaine, hallucinogens, and heroin combined. Abuse has doubled over the last decade and remains at a steady incline. Additionally, many underestimate the effects of prescription drug abuse. These are known to cause choking, slowed breathing, abnormal breathing, infertility, and a greater risk of accidents. The problem is no longer drug dealers and crack or cocaine; it is now prescription drug addiction.

High school students and seniors in America are the most affected by this epidemic. One in five high school students in 2010 misused at least one prescription drug. The effects of abuse are even more damaging for children and also are proven to lead to poor academic performance. In 2013, 336,000 seniors were dependent on painkillers, an increase of 132,000 since 2002. Within this time, elderly citizens have become the largest abusers of prescription drugs. Dependency leads to misuse and then misuse leads to addiction. Between 2012-2013, half of those over 12 who abused prescription drugs received the drugs from friends or family members for free. Specific demographic groups are more susceptible to prescription drug abuse.

## Solution

The more the problem is ignored the worse it gets, and a resolution needs to be found immediately. Doctors are slowly beginning to use time regulated containers when they prescribe drugs to patients. These work by having an individual dose in one slot that opens up at the appropriate time. It will not open before the correct time and is on a schedule set up by the doctor. Afterwards, it must be returned along with any extras. Possession of extra drugs should be illegal and confiscated, if necessary. Keeping extras can lead to dependency and misuse by the patient or can be available for the misuse of their children. These containers are similar to those of gum companies, where the patient simply pushes the pills out of the plastic pouch when the time is correct. Should a refill be necessary, the doctor must sign for it.