

# Prescription Drug Misuse and Abuse in Marin

Our Community in Action



This effort is dedicated to Marin community members working to create a safer Marin, and to those individuals and families who have lost loved ones to this epidemic.

# The Prescription Drug Problem

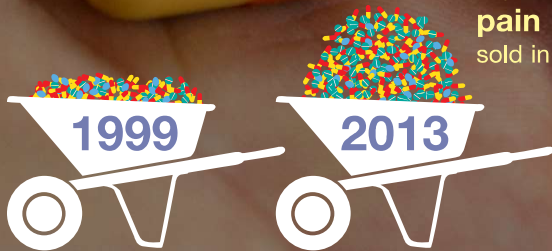
Since 1999, the U.S. has seen a dramatic increase in the number of pain medications, sedatives, and stimulants prescribed. Every community has been affected by this trend. Prescription drugs are easily accessible, perceived to be safer than street drugs, and are highly addictive. When misused, they are usually obtained freely or stolen

from friends or family. As abuse increases, so do accidental deaths. Today, more Americans will overdose on prescription painkillers than from heroin and cocaine combined.

Prescription drug abuse crosses all boundaries—gender, ethnicity, economic status, and age. Because all sectors of society are impacted, solutions will require integrated community-wide approaches.

From 1999 to 2013, the **amount of pain medications** prescribed and sold in the U.S. **nearly quadrupled.**

Yet there has been **no overall change in the amount of pain** Americans report.



# Marin—A Culture at Odds

Marin County is consistently ranked among the healthiest counties in California. Marin values physical activity, nutrition, high air and water quality, and enjoys long life expectancy. In sharp contrast, Marin stands out for high rates of substance-abuse, including excessive alcohol use and a high drug overdose mortality rate. Some attribute this to a “work hard, play hard” culture that has normalized alcohol and prescription drug abuse.

As is seen nationwide, there has been an upward trend in prescribing in Marin. In 2013, Marin-health care providers wrote over 400,000 prescriptions for narcotics, sedatives, or stimulants—enough for 60 pills for every adult and child in the county. With these high levels of use come high levels of misuse and abuse. Over the last 15 years, drug-associated emergency room visits and drug-related deaths in Marin County have more than tripled.

## In Marin, 2012 and 2013:

Deaths from motor vehicle accidents: **66**

Deaths from breast cancer: **73**

Deaths from drug overdoses: **76**

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# A Community-built Initiative

RxSafe Marin was born out of the growing realization that the prescription drug problem had become an epidemic in Marin. In 2013, as the Marin County Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force began tracking the number of lives lost to prescription drug abuse, other Marin organizations and agencies were turning their attention toward the issue. With support from Marin County Health and Human Services, a team of community members formed to focus on reducing prescription drug misuse and abuse. In a February 2014 public meeting, more than 100 Marin residents spanning generations, ethnic groups, and areas of expertise convened to better understand the scope and complexities of the problem, and to develop a plan of action. By reviewing current data and sharing personal stories, the community created a set of goals and a structure through which to achieve them—an effort that would become RxSafe Marin.



## The Changing Face of the Epidemic

The epidemic of prescription drug misuse and abuse affects people of all ages, and it often starts in youth. In Marin, 1 in 5 11th graders report using prescription drugs recreationally. Among people who abuse drugs, one third started with prescription drugs. In the past five years Marin County has seen a doubling in the number of young adults seeking treatment for opiate abuse. Prescription drug misuse among older adults has also risen steeply—a significant concern in Marin, where 20% of residents are over 65. Women are also increasingly effected, with pain medication overdose deaths rising by a staggering 400% for women since 1999.

**“When I was in high school, everyone around me would raid their parents’ medicine cabinet. Prescription drugs are just highly accessible.”**

— Michaela Massoletti, *Co-founder, Safe Passage Recovery*

# The RxSafe Marin Initiative

RxSafe Marin was established in early 2014 to reduce prescription drug misuse and abuse. The Initiative is driven by a diverse coalition of community members, including among others: law enforcement, physicians, pharmacists, elected officials, treatment professionals, Department of Health and Human Services, District Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, and Office of Education collaboratively addressing the problem in Marin.



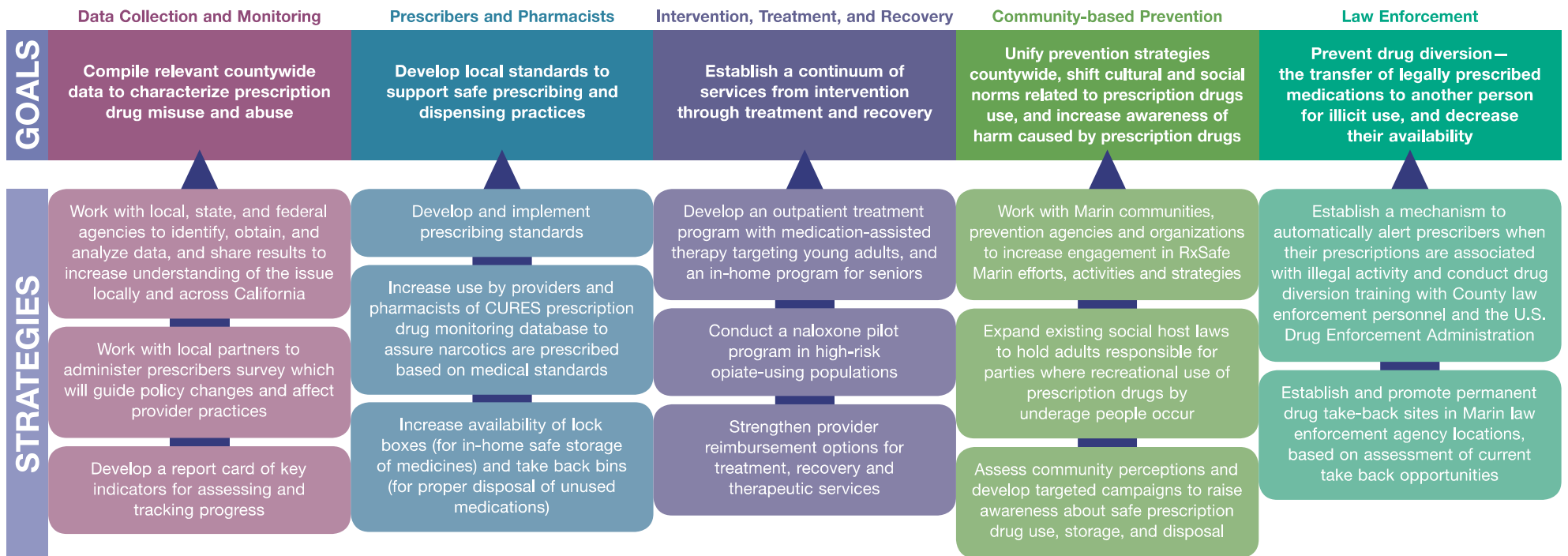
**“To change this culture, multiple levels of awareness have to occur. Certainly, in society as a whole, we need to understand that this is a futile pathway of treatment—that opioids for chronic pain do not work.”**

— Marshall Kubota, MD, *Regional Medical Director, Partnership Health Plan*

# The Prescription Drug Pathway— Opportunities for Impact

RxSafe Marin targets opportunities throughout the life of a pill to influence its path away from misuse and abuse and ensure comprehensive impact.







# Blueprint for Action

RxSafe Marin is structured to take advantage of the diverse experiences and expertise in our community to achieve a singular vision: to stop prescription drug misuse and abuse and save lives.

**Goals** Changes in policy, practice, public awareness, and cultural norms are outlined in five broad goals outlined here.

**Strategies** The Strategies on the next page are the specific actions being taken to achieve these goals. This plan of action evolves, adapting to changes in the community and to trends affecting prescription drug use and abuse.



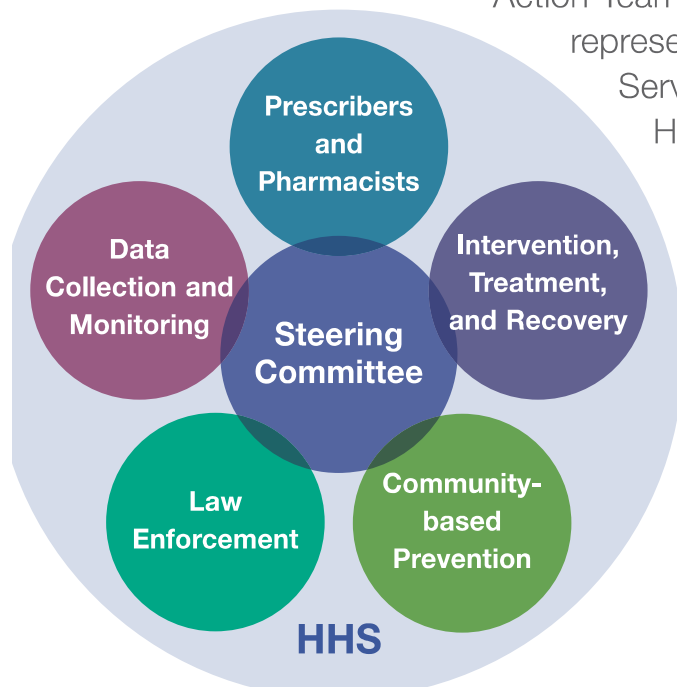
**“We lock up our guns. If you can get \$80 a pill for OxyContin, why don’t we lock up our narcotics?”**

— Fred Mayer, RPh, MPH, *President, Pharmacists Planning Services, Inc.*

# Strategic Framework

The strength of RxSafe Marin is in its community-based structure. Five **Action Teams** advance community-identified strategies, and lead and coordinate key community efforts. The Action Teams are comprised of stakeholders including community members, County of Marin, health care, education, law enforcement and business partners.

Action Team Leaders form the **Steering Committee** with representation from Marin County Health and Human Services, Marin County Office of Education, and Healthy Marin Partnership. The Steering Committee provides guidance, support, and coordination between Action Teams, monitors progress, and serves as the public voice. Financial, technical, and logistical support is provided by Marin County Health and Human Services, Marin County Board of Supervisors, and Healthy Marin Partnership.



ACTION TEAM

## Data Collection and Monitoring

Addressing the prescription drug problem in Marin requires an understanding of the problem, based not only on anecdotal or qualitative information, but also on accurate, relevant data. Data Collection and Monitoring Team addresses this need by determining what data best describe prescription drug misuse in Marin County and tracking changes in community behaviors and prescribing practices. The Action Team partnered with seven distinct state and local agencies to create a report card with key indicators to inform RxSafe Marin strategies and allow measurement of impact over time.

**“We were impressed to see that Marin was already on track with this issue. Our Health Plan is one piece but it’s a community effort. One provider, one plan really can’t solve the issue.”**

— Lynn Scuri, *Regional Director, Partnership Health Plan*





#### ACTION TEAM

## Prescribers and Pharmacists

Evidence indicates that prescribing guidelines for healthy and safe amounts of opiates can help improve patient outcomes, and limit the risk of unintended harm. Prescribers and Pharmacists Team is focused on balancing the benefits of medicines with the harm of over-prescribing, and the potential for abuse and addiction. The Action Team develops mechanisms to reduce the amount of opiate drugs prescribed in Marin by primary care and emergency department physicians and is furthering methods of safe in-home storage and disposal of unused, unwanted, and expired medications.

**“RxSafe Marin efforts allow us as clinicians to take on safer practices and changes with a lot more confidence, knowing that we have a broader support.”**

— Babak Ettekal, MD, *Site Director, Marin Community Clinic*



ACTION TEAM

## Intervention, Treatment, and Recovery

RxSafe Marin recognizes that the epidemic of prescription abuse has left many Marin residents in need of support for addiction or dependence. In response the Intervention, Treatment, and Recovery Team is dedicated to increasing age appropriate treatment services with access to healthcare, medically assisted treatment options, employment, and ongoing psychological and social support for those in recovery. Naloxone, a drug used to reverse opioid overdose, is also being distributed to high-risk individuals.

**“We’re the only nation in the world that allows direct-to-consumer drug advertising. When you go to the doctor’s office and you’re telling them what to prescribe for you, that’s wrong.”**

— Mark Dale, *Founder, Marin County Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force*





#### ACTION TEAM

## Community-based Prevention

Prescription drug misuse among youth, adults, and seniors is tied to the beliefs that prescription drugs are safer and less addictive than street drugs. Prescription drugs can also be easier to get than street drugs, and generally with less stigma attached. The Community-based Prevention Team is committed to changing existing cultural norms that make social use of prescription drugs acceptable. The Action Team focuses on educating the community about prescription drugs by raising awareness about dangers and addictions associated with misuse.

**“What can benefit a life, can cause great harm as well. The drug take back ordinance is important to assure all partners, including manufacturers, do their part to close the loop to make sure drugs are safely disposed and don’t enter the environment.”**

— Greg Knell, *Trustee, San Rafael City Schools Board of Education*

## ACTION TEAM

# Law Enforcement

Assigning responsibility and intervening when prescription drugs are used harmfully is often difficult. Working with law enforcement agencies and justice partners, the Law Enforcement Team addresses the complex legal and enforcement challenges related to drug diversion—the use of legally prescribed drugs for unintended or unlawful purposes—by establishing protocols to efficiently identify the sources of prescription drugs, establish a non-punitive mechanism to notify associated prescribers, and reduce availability for abuse and misuse. The Action Team also seeks to build bridges between offenders to needed rehabilitative services.

**“There used to be stigma about taking prescription drugs. And now it’s almost the opposite. It’s not going out and just drinking anymore, now it’s going out and taking Xanax along with drinking.”**

— Officer Andrew Barclay, Public Information Officer, California Highway Patrol



# Get Involved

Join an Action Team.

Connect with us on Facebook.

Create a prescription drug abuse prevention coalition in your community.

Save lives.

**Learn more.**

**[RxSafeMarin.org](http://RxSafeMarin.org)**