



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Office of the Governor

William A. Hazel, Jr., MD  
Secretary of Health and Human Resources

January 30, 2015

Dear Prescriber:

In 2013 more Virginians died from overdose than died in auto accidents: 468 people died in Virginia from a prescription opiate overdose, and another 213 died from heroin. Since 2000, deaths from prescription drug overdoses in Virginia have more than doubled, and deaths from heroin overdoses have doubled in just the past two years.

On September 26, 2014, Governor McAuliffe established the **Task Force on Prescription Drug and Heroin Abuse** to combat this problem. This group, co-chaired by Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Brian Moran and myself, is tasked with recommending short-term and long-term measures that can tackle prescription drug and heroin abuse and addiction, using best practices and evidence-based strategies.

The Governor and this Task Force are committed to reversing these dangerous trends, but to do so we need your help. Most people who abuse heroin begin with the illicit use of prescription drugs, and all too often properly prescribed prescription drugs end up being abused. That is why we are asking you to:

1. Continue to use the Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP). By checking the prescription history of patients before initiating a course of scheduled drugs, you have contributed in an almost *75% decrease* in doctor shopping (i.e., patients using 5 or more prescribers and 5 or more pharmacies) since 2012. If you are not yet registered to use the PMP, [here](#) is a link.
2. Stay up-to-date with best practices in pain management, addiction, and opiate prescribing. Quality continuing education is available from numerous sources, such as professional associations and employer-sponsored CME. On-line courses are available, such as these from the National Institute on Drug Abuse ([NIDA](#)) and the Federation of State Medical Boards ([FSMB](#)). Also, the National Institute on Drug Abuse has a variety of [Opioid Prescribing Resources](#).
3. Discuss safe storage and proper disposal of controlled substances with your patients. In one survey teens cited ease of obtaining drugs from home medicine cabinets as their top reason for using them. Encourage your patients to purchase a lockbox, and dispose of unused medications at take-back days or the nearest drop-off center (search [here](#) or call the DEA at 1-800-882-9539 to find a center).

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4. Be mindful of the quantity of your opiate prescriptions. Let's keep extra medications out of the medicine cabinet in the first place.

In addition, the Board of Medicine has adopted guidance document #85-24, on the *Use of Opiate Analgesics in the Treatment of Chronic Pain*, which you may find helpful.

Together we can stem the tide of prescription drug abuse. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William A. Hazel, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

William A. Hazel, Jr., M.D.