

White House announces plans to reduce prescription drug abuse



By Wendell Marsh

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(Reuters) - President Barack Obama's administration unveiled on Tuesday a plan to fight what it calls a prescription drug abuse epidemic.

Between 2002 and 2009, the number of Americans aged 12 and older abusing pain relievers increased by 20 percent, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

"Unintentional [drug overdose is a growing epidemic](#) in the U.S. and is now the leading cause of injury death in 17 states," Center for Disease Control Director Dr. Thomas Frieden was quoted as saying in a statement from the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy.

The Obama administration's plan entails a government-wide public health approach to reduce drug abuse and asks an additional \$123 million for drug prevention and an additional \$99 million for treatment programs in the 2012 fiscal year, according to the statement.

"Today we are making an unprecedented commitment to combat the growing problem of prescription drug abuse," the statement quoted Vice President Joe Biden as saying.

"This plan will save lives, and it will substantially lessen the burden this epidemic takes on our families, communities, and workforce," he said.

The plan focuses on requiring drug makers to educate the medical community about the safe use of prescription drugs, beefing up prescription drug monitoring programs, recommending responsible disposal methods for unused medications, and reducing the prevalence of [pill mills](#) and doctor shopping through enforcement efforts.

The plan aims for a 15 percent reduction over five years in nonmedical use of prescription-type psychotherapeutic drugs among people 12 and older, and a similar decrease in the number of unintentional overdose deaths.

As a part of the plan, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration ordered painkiller makers to provide educational materials to help train physicians about the correct use of the drugs.

The federal regulator has sent letters to drugmakers manufacturing opioids asking them to prepare materials that physicians or prescribers can use while counseling patients about the risks and benefits of opioid use.

An outside expert on drug problems told Reuters in a telephone interview that two key demographic elements were among his and his group's concerns in fighting prescription drug abuse.

John Challis, vice president of treatment for [Daytop Village](#), a family-oriented drug treatment facility in New York City, said one was the rising number of young people who are taking opioids and may seek different, harder drugs after their supply of prescription drugs dries up, he said.

Another, Chalis said, is that the aging members of the baby boomer generation increasingly are becoming dependent on hard pain relievers.

Clear data on prescription drug abuse is difficult to provide, he said, because by the time many people [get treatment](#), their prescription drug problem is compounded with other substance abuse problems.

(Editing by [Jerry Norton](#))

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