



## Key Points: Ensuring Safe and Appropriate Prescription Painkiller Use The Important Role of Community Health Plans

### The issue:

- Prescription drug misuse is a growing public health challenge. In 2009, more than 15,000 Americans died from opioid misuse, four times more than in 1999. Over the same time period, the number of opioid prescriptions filled has increased from 120 million to 202 million.
- In 2007, total societal costs of prescription opioid abuse in the United States were estimated at over \$55 billion. Opioid abuse and diversion costs health insurers an additional \$72 billion a year.

*Ensuring Safe and Appropriate Prescription Painkiller Use*, a report by the Alliance of Community Health Plans, found that **community health plans are taking steps to ensure safe and appropriate treatment of pain by:**

- Building partnerships with community members and stakeholders around the common goal of preventing opioid misuse
- Placing the patient at the center of pain care through use of individualized care plans
- Engaging providers around evidence-based prescribing guidelines
- Managing medications covered by the health plan to ensure use of, and access to, safe therapies
- Using data to identify patients, prescribers, and pharmacists for outreach

### Results:

- Group Health Cooperative in Seattle, Washington increased the percentage of patients on chronic opioid therapy who had individualized care plans from three percent to 96 percent, while reducing the number of patients on high doses of opioids.
- Kaiser Permanente of Southern California reduced prescriptions of brand-name opiates – which have a higher street value and more risk of diversion – when a generic was available, by 80 percent between 2010 and 2012.
- In its first year, the Pain Management Program at UPMC Health Plan in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania led to 13 percent fewer opioid claims for members by providing physicians with tools and resources to prescribe opioids safely.
- Presbyterian Health Plan in Albuquerque, New Mexico documented an 80 percent reduction in the number of prescriptions for OxyContin between 2007 and 2012 by working with pain specialists in the state.
- Capital Health Plan in Tallahassee, Florida reduced net pharmacy costs by \$21.33 per member per month for commercial members who were identified as at high risk of misuse, and who received outreach from the plan.

### The bottom line:

- Drawing on a broad scope of information and coordinating the efforts of providers, pharmacists, and community organizations, health plans play a key role in ensuring safe and appropriate use of opioids.
- The initiatives in place at ACHP member plans appear to reduce doses of opioids used to safer levels, improve coordination of care and patient-physician communication, and lower costs; these can serve as models for other organizations seeking to improve or initiate or improve their own opioid programs.

**The Alliance of Community Health Plans (ACHP)** is a national leadership organization bringing together innovative health plans and provider groups that are among America's best at delivering affordable, high-quality coverage and care.

The community based and regional health plans and provider organizations from across the country that make up ACHP's membership provide coverage and care for approximately 16 million Americans. These 22 organizations focus on improving the health of the communities they serve and are on the leading edge of innovations in affordability and the quality of care.

To learn more about ACHP, visit us at [www.achp.org](http://www.achp.org).

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