

DIVERTED PRESCRIPTION OPIOIDS STUDY

OBJECTIVES

- What are people's motivations for diverting prescription opioids?
- Why do people use diverted prescription opioids?
- How do contextual factors such as poverty and criminalization impact prescription opioid diversion?

We interviewed 31 people about their experiences either diverting prescription opioids or using prescription opioids not prescribed to them. The interviews focused on motivations, pros and cons of diversion, and factors affecting the use and diversion of prescription opioids.

FINDINGS

- Many people had challenges with getting a prescription – some had their prescriptions reduced or were cut off completely by their doctors
- People bought prescription opioids from the street and had a preference for these because of their known and reliable contents, ability to treat pain, and to get high
- Those who sold their prescription opioids were motivated by a desire to help others to reduce overdose risk and withdrawal symptoms
- Poverty affected all participants, leading some to sell their prescriptions to get money while others were unable to always buy prescription opioids due to their higher cost compared to fentanyl
- The criminalization of the possession and trafficking of prescription opioids was discussed as a concern
- Counterfeit pills containing unknown contents were also a concern for some

WHATS NEXT?

1. Prescribing policies and practices must be informed by a harm reduction approach rather than a punitive approach
2. Prescription opioids are a safer alternative to the toxic drug supply and there is a need for wider implementation of safer supply programs to meet the needs of the community
3. Safer supply programs should include a variety of drug types and dispensing models that meet people where they are at
4. Efforts are needed to provide employment opportunities that pay living wages to people who use drugs to reduce the negative effects of poverty
5. Since diversion is a protective measure, the decriminalization of the possession and trafficking of diverted prescription opioids should be explored

QUOTES

"You'll overdose on the street drugs. I'm not going to overdose on Dilaudid ... there's a big difference [between] street drugs and prescription drugs."

"It's getting me a few bucks in my pocket. And if I got no money for the rocks, I'll just sell it to get by. But I don't sell them all. I can't, I need [my prescription]."

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