



**CoOPDM Response to Stakeholder  
Feedback and Ideas in:  
"From Exploration to Direction: What  
People Said - A Synthesis of Messages  
from Consultations and Research  
Undertaken by the Coalition on  
Prescription Drug Misuse"**

**October 13, 2010**



## Introduction

This is the Coalition response to the report, [From Exploration to Direction: What People Said - A Synthesis of Messages from Consultations and Research Undertaken by the Coalition on Prescription Drug Misuse](#), prepared by Joanne O'Connell with O'Connell Enterprises at the request of the Coalition on Prescription Drug Misuse (CoOPDM). Page | 2

The CoOPDM was formed in 2008 to positively address the issue of prescription drug misuse in Alberta. Over the past two years, our group has undertaken research and community-based initiatives and has gathered a significant amount of information and data. We have engaged many industry, government and community leaders on the issue of prescription drug misuse.

[From Exploration to Direction](#) is a summary of the feedback, suggestions and thoughts the CoOPDM has heard from various stakeholders during our mandate thus far. The CoOPDM believed it was important to provide a response to the report and the ideas and feedback it summarizes. We also wanted to identify some of our next steps on this issue. Joanne organized the issue into seven distinct themes. CoOPDM has provided a response to each theme.

While to date the CoOPDM has taken a volunteer, leadership role on prescription drug misuse, we do believe the scope goes beyond the member organizations at the table. Addressing this issue is not the sole responsibility of CoOPDM. We believe that governments, organizations, communities and individuals all share in this responsibility.

While many others must step up and take part in the effort to end the misuse of prescription drugs, the CoOPDM is committed to continuing its role in facilitating dialogue, increasing education and advocating for progress. We hope that *From Exploration to Direction* and this response document identifies the path that CoOPDM and others can begin to take.

## CoOPDM's Response to the Seven Themes

### **Need for a Strategy**

Prescription drug misuse is a complex issue. Over the last two years, we have learned that the issue is more multifaceted and complicated than we first envisioned. We have also learned that thoroughly addressing the issue goes well beyond the resources and scope of the CoOPDM. A definitive response to this issue requires a high level approach: well-considered, comprehensive and coordinated.

The CoOPDM agrees that:

- a formal, written strategy that addresses prescription drug misuse is required to capitalize on and direct the motivation and need that exists today;
- developing a strategy will not be a quick or easy exercise, but will require a highly collaborative approach that addresses the health, legal, criminal and social angles of this issue;



- no matter how good a written strategy may be, to be truly effective it must be supported with sufficient human and financial resources .

The CoOPDM lacks the authority and resources to develop a strategy independently. After much discussion and reflection, CoOPDM believes:

- development of a prescription drug misuse strategy must be led by government;
- close consultation and coordination with the various professions and organizations engaged on this issue is essential.

CoOPDM actions going forward:

- encouraging government to include prescription drug misuse as a part of our province's public health and community safety agenda;
- asking government to take a leadership role and work collaboratively with the professions, communities and industry to develop a comprehensive, long-term strategy to address the issue.

### **Need for Increased Awareness**

The report From Exploration to Direction reflects the wide range of understanding about, and experience with, the issue of prescription drug misuse. While there are individuals, communities and groups that have actively explored or experienced the issue of misuse, there are many more individuals, communities and groups that are learning about or seeing prescription drug misuse for the first time.

The CoOPDM agrees that:

- prescription drug misuse is an under-recognized problem not only within the general population but also among key government, professional and community decision-makers;
- as long as awareness of the seriousness and scope of the issue remains low, we will continue to have misuse and the consequences that arise from it.

CoOPDM actions going forward:

- increasing government, professional and public awareness of the issue will be a key priority in any action we undertake;
- support efforts to educate and build greater awareness with a range of populations and groups, including university students and healthcare professionals;
- work with the media to build awareness of the issue
- work with governments and other partners to plan and coordinate a public social marketing campaign that can begin to change perceptions of prescription drugs and change the behaviours that contribute to misuse.

### **Need for an Increased Knowledge Base**

One of our achievements to date has been increased information sharing between groups and organizations that previously did not connect. Prior to our formation, individual groups, professions and governments rarely gathered to discuss prescription drug misuse and related issues. Our individual members, in addition to participants in the Symposium and community efforts, have seen firsthand the benefits that come from sharing experiences and information.



The CoOPDM agrees that:

- more information sharing between professions, communities and individuals is needed;
- the transfer of data and knowledge must be more coordinated, sophisticated and on a much larger scale in order to have a noticeable and lasting impact on the issue;
- no one organization has access to the data and knowledge required to fully assess and address the issue;
- prescription drug misuse has not been widely acknowledged as a public health, law enforcement and community issue, resulting in a limited amount of research and information gathering and sharing.

The CoOPDM believes that:

- there needs to be a more coordinated approach to collecting, analyzing and sharing data on prescription drug use and misuse
- various professions and organizations may currently have access to information and trend data that could be valuable to a better understanding of, and response to, this complex issue;
- with a greater transfer of knowledge, we can begin to appreciate trends, detect and prevent misuse, and provide more effective support and care;
- effective knowledge transfer will be a key component of any strategy on prescription drug misuse.

CoOPDM actions going forward:

- continue to approach Health Canada, Alberta Health and Wellness and Alberta Blue Cross about sharing and using relevant data that will help enlighten understanding of the extent and scope of the issue;
- use our networks and influence to encourage organizations and governments to share the information and data that we do have, and collect and analyze the information we don't.

### **Need for Coordinated Action**

To address prescription drug misuse, a multi-dimensional approach must be pursued. Stakeholders need to be engaged and work together in order to decrease and prevent the misuse of prescription medication.

The CoOPDM agrees that:

- we must be mindful of the need for multidisciplinary, coordinated action. The spirit of the CoOPDM has always been based on coordination and collaboration, bringing together many different professions, organizations and groups to collaboratively reflect on and address the issue;
- coordinated community action must be matched by individual action and individual responsibility. The collaborative work of organizations must happen alongside the efforts of individuals directly affected by misuse. As stakeholders, we carry individual responsibilities alongside our collective, coordinated ones.



The CoOPDM believes that:

- we need to take seriously the feedback provided by stakeholders that is specific to our members' individual professions. The physicians, pharmacists, treatment providers, police officers, government representatives on the CoOPDM acknowledge that individually they have a role to play in positively addressing the issue, or contributing to continued misuse if they choose to ignore it;
- CoOPDM can foster dialogue and action within their respective professions and organizations;
- privacy legislation and policies can be significant barriers to action. However it is our view that further exploration and dialogue is required to better understand privacy related barriers and issues;
- while prescription drug misuse impacts every Alberta community, it is more targeted to certain demographics and populations than others;
- our work to date has focused on addiction to prescription medication rather than the separate but connected issue of accidental poisonings from prescription drugs.

CoOPDM action going forward:

- coordinated and collaborative action must be a central component of any prescription drug misuse strategy;
- continue to monitor progress in other provinces and jurisdictions;
- encourage the development of an organized system for capturing, communicating and sharing information between stakeholders on prescription drug misuse.

### **Need for Increased Professional Capacity**

Our system and society needs to continue to build capacity to address the treatment and prevention of prescription drug misuse.

The CoOPDM agrees that:

- more training and education of physicians, pharmacists, police officers, treatment providers, veterinarians, medical students and others is needed to make progress on this issue. Representatives from the various professions agree that more education and awareness in their respective field is required;
- while our treatment system in Alberta has helped many people address their addiction, the resources and spaces available remain limited. One of the consequences of raising awareness and cracking down on prescription drug misuse is that there will be more people seeking help and treatment from our healthcare system. More resources and/or innovative approaches to treatment may be required in order to meet the increased demands that could result.

CoOPDM action going forward:

- support the need for greater professional capacity to assist those who misuse prescription drugs;
- through our existing relationships and new ones, we will continue to facilitate this discussion and advocate for many of the ideas presented.



### **Need for Social/Environmental Changes**

Canadians are among the heaviest consumers of psychotropic medications in the world. While most prescription drug use is legitimate and medically necessary, there are some who abuse the system and use drugs for other than their intended purpose. Compounding the situation is the overwhelming societal belief that prescription drugs are "safe" as compared to illicit, illegal drugs and substances.

The CoOPDM agrees that:

- Changing norms is not a quick or easy task. Having people understand and appreciate the dangers and risks inherent to prescription or over the counter drugs is a task that goes far beyond our provincial borders and well beyond the mandate and capacity of the CoOPDM

CoOPDM action going forward:

- continue to champion with governments, national and provincial organizations, professional colleges, media and others the need for a coordinated, long-term social marketing campaign to change perceptions on prescription drugs and behaviours related to their misuse.

### **Need for Policy Changes**

There are many legislative, regulatory and organizational policy changes that should be instituted before progress in many other areas can be achieved.

The CoOPDM agrees that:

- legislative barriers may be created by the different privacy acts, the Criminal Code and other laws. Further exploration of these apparent challenges will be required before the CoOPDM or any group or body can effectively advocate and influence;
- many organizations and regulatory colleges may also have policies or procedures in place that limit information sharing and collaboration;
- increasing awareness amongst governments, organizations and the general public will take time.

CoOPDM action going forward:

- continue to use its networks and members to help understand the implications of policy issues and communicate these to governments and decision makers within key organizations who are in a position to respond.

### **Going Forward**

The CoOPDM is committed to actively addressing the issue of prescription drug misuse. While many of our next steps are listed under the responses cited above, key actions the CoOPDM will take over the next 6 months follow. The CoOPDM will:

- Increase collaboration, raise awareness and advocate for changes on the issue with government and community stakeholders, and allies.
- Conduct additional research and information gathering to better understand the scope and severity of the issue, including the mining and synthesis of existing data sources and encouraging the development of an organized system of information capture and sharing.



- Educate and build awareness on prescription drug misuse with the public, key stakeholders, university students and the various professions through direct contact and indirect influence (i.e.: media).
- Develop and evaluate a community level demonstration project that attempts to utilize and coordinate information and technology to positively impact prescription drug misuse within a community(s) (dependent on funding).

In conclusion, we commit to keeping our stakeholders and colleagues apprised of our progress, the challenges we encounter and the gains we begin to make.