

## **Opioid Disposal Project Summary**

The Foundation collaborated with FDA to explore the current landscape and potential opportunities for increasing access to safe disposal methods for unused and expired opioid medications. The project focused on understanding consumer perspectives and needs related to opioid disposal.

### **Project Focus**

To conduct a landscape analysis of current disposal options, their use, and the anticipated impact of mail-back envelope (MBE) distribution under the Opioid Analgesic Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (OA REMS) by:

1. Exploring the successes, challenges, funding sources, and reach of current opioid disposal programs operated by
  - chain and independent pharmacies
  - community-based and state programs
  - healthcare clinics
2. Identifying pharmacy awareness of and implementation plans for the OA REMS modification related to MBEs
3. Understanding consumer perspectives and motivations related to disposal of unused/expired opioids

### **What We Did**

The Foundation conducted a landscape analysis of current disposal options, their use, and the potential impact of MBE distribution under the OA REMS. To inform this analysis, we conducted a literature review of published studies evaluating opioid disposal methods and conducted interviews with pharmacists, physician clinical researchers, and representatives from professional organizations.

### **What We Learned**

Analysis of the interviews revealed five key discussion themes:

1. Awareness of the OA REMS
  - Awareness of the REMS program and the availability of mail-back envelopes provided by the OA REMS manufacturers was high for professional organizations and low for pharmacists and other providers
2. Access to mail-back envelopes
  - How to access the MBEs through the OA REMS was not straightforward at the time of the interviews. The website has since been updated <https://www.opioidanalgesicrems.com/home.html>

3. Incorporation of mail-back envelopes into current practice
  - Many pharmacists and pharmacies have a system in place for opioid disposal education (providing information about where/how to dispose of opioids) and/or a medication disposal program that align with the OA REMS
4. Perceptions regarding patient acceptance of MBEs
  - From the perspective of the pharmacists and providers interviewed, acceptance and use of MBEs by patients have been met with mixed responses. Some patients feel comfortable using MBEs while others expressed concern about disposing of opioids via the mail.
5. Desire for various options to facilitate opioid disposal
  - Pharmacists and pharmacies prefer having different options available for opioid disposal that can be tailored to their patients and setting

### **Lessons Learned & Key Takeaways**

Mail-back envelopes provide an additional method for disposing of unused opioids. More disposal options benefit everyone.

- Pharmacists/pharmacies and health systems want choices about methods to offer for opioid disposal. One size does not fit all.
- Pharmacists want to understand how their current processes and systems align with the OA REMS. Implementing new systems requires time, education, and expense.
- Patients want options for how they dispose of their medication. Disposing of opioids via the mail raises concerns for some patients, and not all people interact with the US postal system on a regular basis.