

# Rx Abuse in Tribal Communities: A Call to Protect our Elders, Children and Nations from an Epidemic



## The Problem

There is a growing epidemic sweeping our American Indian Communities. Children, elders, friends and family members are addicted to or are dying from prescription drug abuse. While the medication is meant for healing, when in the wrong hands, it can lead to lifelong problems of substance abuse, addiction and death.

Consider these facts:

- American Indian youth in Arizona abuse prescription drugs at a rate higher than the state average. (7% v. 5.8%, Arizona Youth Survey, 2016)
- In Arizona, from 2012-2015, there was a 32.6% increase in deaths due to unintentional poisonings. (Alcohol, prescription and other drugs – Health Status Profile of American Indians in Arizona, 2015)
- 1 in 15 people who abuse prescription opioid pain relievers will try heroin within 10 years. (National Institute of Drug Abuse)
- Those who are addicted to prescription opioid pain relievers are 40X more likely to be addicted to heroin. (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2011-2013)

## What Can We Do?

Join with The Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, the Indian Country Intelligence Network, Indian Health Service and AZ HIDTA to raise awareness in four key areas:

- Encourage parents and elders to start conversations and share stories with youth about the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse including misuse of prescription drugs.
- Find environmentally safe ways to dispose of unused, expired or unwanted medication.
- Have a safe and secure storage of medicine in the home that prevents theft and protects families.
- Educate women who are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant on the danger of abusing medication.

## Three Steps to Get Started

1. Host a training for Tribal health staff and your community about medicine safety.
2. Install prescription drug drop boxes at Tribal police locations or partner with the Drug Enforcement Administration on prescription drug take back days 2x per year.
3. Encourage law enforcement to attend the Prescription Drug Crimes Investigation course offered by AZ HIDTA.