

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

Evaluating the Prescription Monitoring Program

Washington's Prescription Monitoring Program was established in 2011 to address concerns with rising use and abuse of opioid pain medicines. The addictive nature of these medicines can prompt patients to seek more pills than they should be taking or for longer periods than prescribing practices advise. Patients may resort to "doctor shopping" (seeking prescriptions from multiple health care prescribers simultaneously in order to acquire more than any one doctor would prescribe) and "pharmacy shopping" (bouncing from pharmacy to pharmacy in hopes of getting multiple prescriptions filled without anyone detecting illicit activity). Overprescribing of opioids by prescribers who are unaware of the patient's efforts to seek more pills can foster addiction and the possibility of overdose.

The Prescription Monitoring Program is overseen by the Department of Health (DOH). Its key tool is a database which prescribers use for the purpose of checking a patient's prior prescription history before they prescribe opioid medicines. In many cases, state regulations require such checks. The database records controlled substances a patient has been dispensed so that medical professionals can ensure they do not prescribe an unsafe quantity of opioids or a dangerous combination of medicines. Prescribers rely on program data to make decisions about patient care, so it is critical to ensure it is reliable and up-to-date.

Since 2019, prescribers have been required to register or demonstrate they have other access to use the program and check the database before prescribing a controlled substance. DOH currently tracks the usage rates of the system (for example, how often the system is accessed), but does not analyze data itself to identify unusual prescribing and dispensing patterns that suggest instances of doctor or pharmacy shopping or overprescribing. By identifying potential improvements to the program and how it is administered, this audit aims to help reduce the risk of misuse and abuse of prescription opioids, and to improve data quality for prescribers and other users of the system.

Preliminary scope and objectives

This audit seeks to answer the following questions:

- Could the state's PMP system be used to monitor opioid prescribing and dispensing patterns and help reduce opioid abuse and misuse?
- Is program data sufficiently complete, accurate and timely to meet the needs of prescribers and other users when making decisions about patient care?

Timing – We plan to publish a report detailing our findings in summer of 2022.



Office of the
Washington
State Auditor
Pat McCarthy

**Director of
Performance and
IT Audit:**
Scott Frank

(564) 999-0809

Scott.Frank@sao.wa.gov

**Principal
Performance Auditor:**
Melissa Smith

(564) 999-0832

Melissa.Smith@sao.wa.gov

**Lead Performance
Auditor:**
Carolyn Cato

(564) 999-0848

Carolyn.Cato@sao.wa.gov

Office of the
Washington State
Auditor

P.O. Box 40021

Olympia, WA

98504-0021

www.sao.wa.gov

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