

EDITORIALS FEBRUARY 11, 2016 3:47 PM

Drug disposal bins welcome tool in opioid fight

HIGHLIGHTS

Walgreens to install 500 disposal bins in stores across the country

Kiosks will give customers a safe way to toss unused opioids

Overdose antidote drug also will be available over the counter





BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

It's one of the least talked about contributors to the nation's opioid epidemic. The millions of bottles of highly addictive painkillers that are sitting in people's medicine cabinets, collecting dust.

It's hard to get rid of the pills safely, even though the glut leads to tens of thousands of deaths each year. Meanwhile, doctors are writing three times as many prescriptions for opioids as they did in the 1990s.

It's a lopsided equation of supply and demand. We applaud Walgreens for being among the first corporations to step up and, at least, try to solve the problem.

The drugstore chain said this week that it will install more than 500 opioid disposal kiosks in 39 states and Washington, D.C. The rollout started in San Luis Obispo. Other, mostly 24-hour Walgreens stores will get kiosks soon, although a spokeswoman wouldn't say whether Sacramento will get one.

Many communities, including ours, need access to such kiosks. In 2014, 30,000 Americans died of an opioid overdose – twice as many people who were murdered that year.

And so it's somewhat disappointing that Walgreens, a company poised to gobble up rival Rite Aid for \$17.2 billion, is only installing 500 kiosks. The chain has about 8,200 locations across North America, and 629 in California.

Walgreens could do more, but it's better than nothing.

It's better than waiting for Congress to defy lobbying dollars from drugmakers and pass a bill, introduced by Rep. Ami Bera, D-Elk Grove, to expand drug take-back programs. It's also better than hanging onto opioids for fear of tainting the water supply by flushing them down the toilet or paying for a kit to toss them safely in the trash.

We urge rival CVS Pharmacy to follow suit with a kiosk program of its own.

Already, CVS has led the way in making naloxone, an overdose antidote, available without a prescription in about a dozen states, not including California. Walgreens has agreed to do the same, but at about 5,800 of its stores in 35 states.

The shameful rub, of course, is that naloxone, a generic drug known by one of its patented names, Narcan, isn't cheap. It can cost between \$40 and \$80 a dose, and at least one maker of it, Rancho Cucamonga's Amphastar Pharmaceuticals, has been accused of price gouging as demand for the drug has skyrocketed.

Talk about a lopsided equation. It's just one more conversation the country needs to have about solving this epidemic of opioid abuse.

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Heidi Sanborn

2 days ago

Walgreen's leadership in being the first national drug store chain to provide safe medicine disposal is commendable. The editorial board rightly points out that 500 locations nationally is a start but with 629 locations in CA alone, we need to make safe medicine disposal as convenient as it is to buy. Drug companies pay for this program in Europe, Canada and Mexico and we are overdue to do the same in the US. For existing medicine drop-off locations paid for with taxes, fees and grants go to www.dontrushtoflush.org

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Richard Leibold

4 days ago

Health care in America should not be about placing profit above life.

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Michael Fasula

5 days ago

Raising the price of something as the demand increases is now considered price gouging? I consider it good economic policy unless you like shortages and corruption.

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