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Issue: Opioid and prescription drug abuse has been on a rapid increase in the state of New Jersey.

Necessary Background: The easy accessibility to these prescription drugs as a result of improper storage and disposal practice has caused extreme growths in the abuse of such drugs. With the legality of such prescriptive drugs for the purpose of painkillers and anxiety treatments, such drugs like oxycodone, percocet, opioids, amytal and benzodiazepines have shown highly addictive qualities.

Evidence: Prescription drugs were implicated in the deaths of more than 700 state residents in both 2011 and 2012, according to statistics released by Dr. Roger Mitchell, the New Jersey assistant state medical examiner (Source 1). In 2005, 4.4 million teenagers (aged 12 to 17) in the US admitted to taking prescription painkillers, and 2.3 million took a prescription stimulant such as Ritalin. 2.2 million abused over-the-counter drugs such as cough syrup. (Source 2). With the rate of prescription drug related deaths only increasing, the abuse of such medications are serving as a threat to society and the youth of this country. The threat and consequences of the misuse of such prescription drugs reflects the growing danger of the issue statewide.

Impact: Although regulation has been taken on a national level resulting in a marked decrease in the use of some illegal drugs like cocaine, nearly one-third of people aged 12 and over who used drugs for the first time in 2009 began by using a prescription drug without a medical need. The abuse of prescription drugs such as oxycodone, percocet, opioids, amytal and benzodiazepines have been defined as a gateway to more addictive and deadly drugs, such as heroin and opiates (Source 3). Although prescription medication is legal in recommended doses, it is considered a controlled substance by the FDA, and these medications are considered illegal when obtained without medical authorization.

Possible Solutions: Addressing the prescription drug abuse epidemic is not only a top priority for public health, but it will also help build stronger communities and allow those with substance abuse disorders to lead healthier, more productive lives. New Jersey has been expanding its efforts to combat prescription drug abuse by sharing prescribing records with doctors and pharmacists in Delaware, and soon with New York, to prevent people from "doctor shopping" in surrounding states. The key components needed to regulate the statewide issue of prescription drug abuse are the education of the harmful effects of such abuse, enforcement, monitoring and proper medication disposal to enact a solution to this growing issue.

Sources:

1. <http://www.nj.gov/lps/ca2/pmp/>
2. <http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/prescription/abuse-international-statistics.html>

3. [http://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/10/christie announces expansion of prescription drug monitoring program to other states.html](http://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/10/christie_announces_expansion_of_prescription_drug_monitoring_program_to_other_states.html)
4. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/prescription-drug-abuse>