

Bucks County Medication Disposal Program Collects Nearly 45 Tons of Medications

Donna Foisy 17 September 2017

Summary

In January 2010, Bucks Promise for Youth and Communities (BPLYC) formed the Bucks County Medication Collection Take-Back Committee with the charge of developing a convenient and environmentally responsible prescription drug disposal program. By including key partners with a joint interest in reducing prescription and over-the-counter drug misuse, a comprehensive plan was developed based on sound prevention strategies. Essential to this strategy is the leadership from county government, including the County Commissioners, Office of the District Attorney, and Drug and Alcohol Commission, Inc. The execution of this highly successful and year-round campaign is made possible through community partnerships, local volunteers, and agency staff.

To date, Bucks County has collected more than 88,357.64 lbs. (more than 44 tons) of unused medications.

Collection totals are inclusive of both the collection day

events and the 34 permanent drop box sites located throughout the county. Bucks County consistently collects a high volume of unused, unwanted, and expired medications, usually leading all county-level collections for the entire state of Pennsylvania. In recognition of this, several federal and state officials, (SAMHSA, the secretary and deputy secretary of Pennsylvania's Department of Drug and Alcohol), conducted a site visit of Bucks County to learn about the successful implementation of the program. This included visiting one of the 34 installed permanent medication drop boxes housed at police stations across Bucks County. In an effort to share best practices and lessons learned, the Bucks Take-Back Committee has also mentored other communities interested in developing Rx disposal programs, and has facilitated presentations/workshops at local, state, and national levels. In 2011, the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Department of Justice, Philadelphia Division presented certificates of appreciation to members of the Bucks County Medication Disposal Program for "outstanding contributions in the field of Drug Law Enforcement." U.S. Congressman Michael Fitzpatrick recognized the Bucks Take Back collections program on the floor of Congress, and also sent a letter of gratitude to each member of the committee.



Keys to the Project

This initiative grew through grassroots support from community members, key leaders, and prevention coalitions who were alarmed by the growing trend of prescription and over the counter drug misuse and abuse among youth. This trend was backed up by data indicated through surveys gathered from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey. Local data showed a low risk harm perception of prescription drug misuse, despite the fact that local studies found pharmaceuticals in the County's water supplies. The Bucks County Medication Collection Committee sought partnerships with other entities with similar goals and then reached out to join in county-wide efforts to prevent further damage to the community.

These collaborative partnerships sought and received

approval from key leaders in the County to allocate resources, funding, and in-kind donations, as well as to establish protocols. This ultimately allowed the program to expand.

This is a grassroots, data-driven effort that follows SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework, built inclusively with partnerships from the bottom-up and top-down and involving multiple sectors across all ages and interests.

Work to Include Underserved and Disparate Populations

The project committee decided to create a two-pronged approach to the initiative and message – first, to **protect our youth** and prevent youth prescription and over the counter drug misuse through education, awareness, and proper medication disposal, and secondly, to **protect the environment** by keeping our streams clean and free of pharmaceutical waste through proper disposal. This approach ensures that our message resonates with all community members from parents to grandparents to individuals concerned about the environment. This message is printed on all flyers and includes statistics related to the issue. All materials produced are written with a focus on being cultural sensitive to ensure that they are relevant to specific community sectors. For example, through a partnership with the Bucks County Realtors, GOT Drugs Toolkits were created. The kits contain: 1.) a

letter to the realtor notifying them of how to use the information when discussing staging or preparing a home for sale and of the potential role they hold in reducing substance abuse in communities, 2.) a letter to the seller with suggestions on safe-guarding medications when showing their property and moving, 3.) drop box collection sites for proper medication disposal, and 4.) a medicine tracking form.

Collections

Bucks County participates in biannual collection day events held in conjunction with the DEA National Collection Days. The committee intensifies its efforts to increase awareness around safe disposal practices through promotion and by using the opportunity to collect data from participants through exit surveys. Community coalitions, youth groups, workers from Bucks County Children & Youth Social Services Agency, and the Medical Reserve Corps volunteer to man collection locations to greet participants, disseminate educational and resource information, and to conduct the exit survey.

Bucks County Community members demonstrate, as indicated by the number of pounds collected during events, a readiness for a more permanent solution for disposing of unneeded medication. 34 drop boxes have been purchased and placed in police municipality buildings where police oversight can be provided. Each box is required to have three sponsoring entities to be

part of the Take-Back project. One-third of the purchase is by the District Attorney's Office, one-third comes from the municipality where the box will be located, and one-third is from a community coalition, agency, or hospital. By sharing the cost of the purchase, no one entity is burdened by its cost; but more importantly, it ensures a vested interest in the success of the box collection. Two mobile boxes promote awareness and enable collections to occur at community events across Bucks County, such as flu clinics, senior expos and games, town halls meetings, and at the Annual County Grange Fair.

In addition, it has become essential to offer medication collection to homebound individuals. The Bucks County Medication Collection Committee, Area Agency on Aging's Meals on Wheels program, and the Sheriff's Department partnered to reach those in the homebound community. Letters and informational flyers are delivered to these residents through mailings and with their meals to ask if they have medications that need to be picked up by a Sheriff for disposal.

Home healthcare workers also provide clients with collection information. Hospice nurses are using "Drug Buster" containers that render medications unusable once placed into these containers. The home healthcare workers play a critical role in helping to promote the Take-Back Events, safe medications practices, and medication drop boxes.

Promotional Materials & Strategies

Multiple promotional strategies are utilized and some are listed below:

- “Bag stuffers” are quarter page sized flyers with information containing details of upcoming collections and are placed by volunteers in grocery bags, placed near cashiers, and attached to prescriptions at pharmacies;
- Electronic Web banners;
- Water & Sewer Bill inserts;
- Robo calls;
- County website;
- Municipal local television channels;
- Press releases, news articles, letters to the editor, and purchased advertisements;
- Social media and e-trees;
- School district notifications;
- Hospital notifications & physician offices;
- Business emails to employees;
- Hanging/distributing flyers & bag stuffers;
- Pizza boxes; and
- Through a partnership with the Bucks County Medical Society and the Montgomery & Bucks County Dental Society, over 1,200 letters were sent to all healthcare offices in Bucks County.

Bucks County Medication Collection Committee continues to work at creating attitudinal and behavioral change, and

indicators have shown that the work to-date has positively impacted community norms. Exit surveys indicate a changing social norm regarding medication disposal and an increased knowledge of resources among Bucks County residents.

Sustaining partnerships and funding are provided by:

Bucks County Drug & Alcohol Commission, Inc.

District Attorney's Office Using drug forfeiture funds. The D.A. has been able to fund police overtime. The County Detectives coordinate collection materials and pick-up at specified collection sites, then arranging for destruction of the medications.

Bucks County Commissioners

Materials printed provided through the Bucks County Print Shop

Bucks County Children & Youth Social Services

Bucks County Department of Health Medical Reserve Corps