

From Policy to Practice

Arizona Rx Initiative

Video Transcript

Chris Asplen: Hi, my name is Chris Asplen, and I'm the Executive Director of the National Criminal Justice Association and the NCJA Center for Justice Planning. This is one in a series of videos where we examine innovative ways that criminal justice planning organizations or SAAs, state administering agencies, look at and implement programs which help to reduce crime and reduce recidivism.

With me today is Andy LeFevre. Andy is the Executive Director of the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission, and Andy is here to talk to us today about the Arizona Prescription Drug Misuse and Abuse reduction program. The Arizona Prescription Drug Misuse and Abuse Reduction Initiative is a multi-systemic approach to reducing drug misuse and abuse in Arizona. Andy, can you tell us about how these strategies were developed?

Andy LeFevre: Sure, well first off, Chris, thanks for having me on, and very excited to talk about let's just call it the Rx Initiative for short so we don't stumble over it all the time.

The Arizona Criminal Justice Commission saw a real need in Arizona to address this issue. The nation, as a nation, the United States is only 5% of the world's population, but we use almost 80% of the world's opioid medication, so pain medication, and at the time we were looking at this issue Arizona was the sixth highest prescriber of opioid medication per population, so clearly there was a need to say, "We're doing something wrong in Arizona. How do we address this?" So we worked with local partners, state agencies like our Department of Health Services, our Medicaid provider that we have in Arizona, and then local coalitions, local police departments, to say, "What can we do to address this problem?"

And we came up with five main pillars that we looked at and created a toolkit for local communities to use. These five pillars looked at how do we impact the supply? So how do we educate parents and grandparents about not leaving medication in their medicine cabinets, because let's be honest, the friends and family plan is primarily where people begin to get opioid medication and abuse it.

We looked at how do we address the prescriber problem? So how do we know if prescribers are overprescribing medication? So it was a focus on getting them signed up for our prescription drug monitoring program, and then providing report cards to them on are you outside of the norm for your prescribing area? Obviously, a doctor that deals with pain management is going to prescribe a lot more opioids than your family doctor does, but looking for those folks that are way outside the norm, and then trying to get them to understand that maybe they need to change the way they're prescribing it.

We worked with local law enforcement to address the demand supply as well by getting drop boxes put into local law enforcement agencies so that there was safe

place for people to drop off that medication, so that it wasn't sitting around at home.

We used the Arizona Youth Survey, which our agency does every other year to look at and get better information on our eighth, tenth and twelfth grade students about their attitudes about using opioid medication, their use, how quickly or how young they're starting to use, how often they're using, and then we developed public relations campaigns to let them know this was really dangerous, and even though it may be cool or kids are doing it, it could lead to some very serious problems for them. And then finally we just looked at overall bringing these things in and doing it.

Unfortunately, when we did this in Arizona, we really didn't have a budget. So this was really very dedicated folks working together to bootstrap this up in, initially, four pilot counties. So Yavapai County, Pinal County, Graham and Greenlee County, so some of our smaller counties first, and then we were very successful in that. So by success I mean, as a final indicator in our non-pilot counties over the time that we were doing his pilot program, deaths from opioid medications went up by 4%, but in those four pilot counties, we actually saw a decline of 10%. So this initiative that we created, this toolkit that we created, if it's implemented correctly in these communities, made a real difference in the number of people that were being killed by opioid medications.

Chris Asplen: It sounds like this is a very multi-system oriented approach to things. Can you tell us a little bit how you got different parts of different systems to work together so well to be successful?

Andy LeFevre: Sure. I think first off there was a real awareness that there was a need, and what we saw was usually one or two people, either in a local community coalition or a Chief of Police or somebody like that saying, "I want to be part of a solution," getting together and beginning to work on these things. Communities could implement any one of these five pillars and begin to see some progress, but what we found is by identifying where those five pillars best fit, and then having all five of them going at once is where we really start to see some tremendous results.

And I think success breeds success, so when our pilot counties started having these results, we were able to then utilize the positive results there to go out and get a grant from the government, a Howard Rogers grant, to bring this into our most populous counties, so we're currently undergoing the same type of program in Maricopa County, which is two thirds of our state's population, so we're extremely hopeful that if we see the same types of results in Maricopa County, we're going to see some real numbers of reductions in opioid deaths.

Chris Asplen: Aside from the comparison between those areas that implemented and those that didn't, were there other benefits that you've seen from the program [inaudible 00:05:55]?

Andy LeFevre: Clearly a heightened awareness in the community about the dangers of this. A real awareness within the medical community about changing their practices. Doctors are beginning to understand, and with a tremendous push from our legislature and our governor's office, that when you go in for that initial prescription, you go into the emergency room or whatever, you often don't need 30 days worth of pills. So our governor actually just signed an Executive Order based on the overall results of what we've been seeing in Arizona, saying you can't write more than a five day script for opioid medications if you're in one of the state run hospitals.

So I think we're seeing a real shift in the way that we're viewing opioid medications, and again what we're hoping to see ultimately is less prescribing, less abuse of these types of things, which ultimately will lead to less crime, because that will mean less people trying to transition from opioid medications over to heroin or those kind of drugs.

Chris Asplen: You mentioned the toolkit that you developed. Will you tell us a little bit more about the toolkit and its accessibility to other organizations and other states out there that might be interested in implementing the same kind of program.

Andy LeFevre: Sure. So if you go onto our website, which is www.azcjc.gov so Arizona Criminal Justice Commission .gov, on our homepage you'll see a pill bottle that says Rx Initiative. If you click on that, you'll get a full downloadable copy of the toolkit, all five of those areas, the best practices that we developed in each of those areas, and it's easily replicable in any community with that toolkit. So we want it to be a resource for other places to use, and we're hopeful that if people begin to use this, they'll see the same positive results that we saw in Arizona.

Chris Asplen: Well, thank you Andy for explaining your program. Thank you, not only for the work that you're doing in Arizona, but also for the way that that may be able to translate to other communities that are looking to reduce their opioid addiction problems also.

As I mentioned in the beginning, this is one of a series of videos that really highlight promising practices and ways that we can prevent crime and reduce recidivism. There are other videos that can be found on our website which is ncjp.org where you can go and observe those videos, and see if there's something there that you can use to help prevent crime in your community. Thank you for joining us.