Background

- Since 1999, the amount of prescription opioids sold in the U.S. quadrupled.\(^1\) In 2012, providers wrote 259 million opioid prescriptions.\(^2\)
- Since 1999, the number of overdose deaths involving opioids quadrupled. From 2000 to 2015 more than 500,000 people died from drug overdoses.\(^1\)
- Opioid abuse can lead to heroin abuse as well. About half of young people surveyed in recent studies reported abusing prescription opioids before starting heroin.\(^3\)

Responding to the National Opioid Crisis

Abuse of prescription painkillers, known as opioids, is a widespread problem in the United States, negatively affecting families across the nation. Aetna is working to help reverse this rising trend with integrated pharmacy, behavioral health, and medical programs. Our programs connect providers and give members seamless access to the right support—mind and body—to fight addiction, while saving millions of dollars for the health care system.

Clinical Intervention and Strategy

Aetna is building on current initiatives to impact every phase of awareness, delivery, and use of opioids. We are expanding on a series of initiatives to reduce the supply of opioids and rates of overdose and to increase the adoption of medication assisted treatment (MAT).

Prevention

Aetna has long sponsored programs to educate dentists (who write 1 in 8 opioid prescriptions) about the dangers of opioids. Also, Aetna helps members to manage and end opioid use by encouraging them to take the least amount possible for the shortest period of time necessary.

Intervention

Aetna promotes the appropriate use of opioids by actively analyzing our claims database and intervening if there is evidence of abuse. For example, Aetna notifies physicians if patients are taking more than three opioids, or if they have multiple prescriptions. Aetna’s opioid oversight program reduced opioid prescriptions by 14 percent between 2010 and 2012 among 4.3 million members.

Treatment

As opioid-related overdoses continue to increase in the United States, Aetna has ended the preauthorization requirements on all MAT buprenorphine products used to treat opioid addiction. Ending the requirement for buprenorphine will increase access to treatment of an addiction.

Recovery

Aetna continues to help find the most effective ways to help people recover. We are beginning to develop value-based contracts with drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers to promote evidence-based approaches to substance use disorders.

“Our goals are to reduce supply, manage appropriate use, increase adoption of medication-assisted treatment, and reduce the rate of opioid related overdoses, ER visits, and deaths.”

Hyong Un, M.D., Chief Psychiatric Officer of Aetna Behavioral Health

Prevention

Intervention

Treatment

Recovery
Aetna’s Commitment to Fighting Prescription Drug Abuse

**Reducing Over-Prescribing and Fraud**

Aetna is committed to addressing prescription drug fraud and over-prescribing. Each year, our Special Investigations Unit (SIU) works tirelessly to stop fraud, waste, and abuse, saving and recovering more than $200 million each year. Our comprehensive approach is multi-faceted.

- The SIU is alerted when there are high volumes of opioid prescriptions being filled, and we work independently and with regulators and law enforcement to reduce fraud.
- Aetna’s Chief Medical Officer recently began sending letters to the top 1 percent of opioid prescribers within their respective specialties to alert them of their prescribing pattern and provide educational materials about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention checklist for prescribing opioids for chronic pain.
- Aetna is a member of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Healthcare Fraud Prevention Partnership (HFPP) and is recognized as a champion in their recent report.

**Increasing Mental Health Awareness and Reducing Stigma**

Aetna is working with stakeholders to study best practices in reducing prescription drug abuse, including organizations such as the National Institute of Drug Abuse, OH State Health University, University of CA San Francisco, and the University of Texas. Other Aetna-supported programs include:

- **Campaign to Change Direction**, a group that encourages people to learn of 5 signs of emotional suffering and reach out with support. We have shared these signs with 15 million people since 2015.
- **Mental Health First Aid**, an evidence-based education program that teaches people how to identify and respond to mental health and substance use disorder issues.
- **Partnerships with Health Analytics** to publish addiction related papers using Aetna-specific data to inform our patient management strategies.

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“Over the years, health care fraud schemes have become more and more complex. We use many tools to fight this fraud, but our collaborative efforts with our legal team and law enforcement are the key to our success.”

Ralph Carpenter, Head of Aetna’s Special Investigations Unit

**Recommendations**

Aetna supports a comprehensive approach to combatting prescription drug abuse and recognizes the need for collaboration. We also applaud Congressional efforts to address this epidemic, including the creation of a ‘lock-in’ program in Medicare Part D that will allow health plans and at-risk beneficiaries to choose a pharmacy for the dispensing of frequently abused drugs. In addition, we support:

- Requiring electronic prescriptions for controlled substances, which is shown to dramatically reduce medication errors and fraud.
- Strengthening Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMP) and allowing for cross-state sharing of information to reduce instances of abuse. Also, prescribers should be required to check state PDMP when prescribing opioids.
- Increasing adoption rates and reducing pharmacy benefits barriers to access MAT and expanding access to Narcan for at-risk patients.
- Studying best practices to establish well-defined criteria in pain management and substance use disorder treatment and expanding value-based contracting related to substance use disorder.

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