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## **Arapahoe County, Kaiser Permanente and State of Colorado launch plans to combat deaths from prescription drug abuse**

*County brings together community task force to battle fastest growing drug problem in Colorado in advance of Sept. 27 National Prescription Drug Take Back Day*

**LITTLETON, CO** --- On Wednesday, Arapahoe County, Kaiser Permanente and Colorado officials urged residents to help combat prescription drug abuse by safely disposing of unused prescription drugs in drop-off locations throughout Arapahoe County Sept. 27.

Arapahoe County is participating in National Prescription Drug Take Back Drug Day as part of an overall strategy to combat unnecessary deaths from prescription drug abuse.

“This silent, invisible and insidious killer is among us and the consequences of prescription drug abuse are far reaching and devastating,” said Commissioner Bill Holen, who helped organize the task force along with former Sheriff Grayson Robinson and former Coroner Michael Dobersen. “We are dedicating our resources to address a problem that continues to kill more and more people each year.”

Since 2013, Arapahoe County – currently led by Commissioner Bill Holen, Coroner Dr. Kelly Lear-Kaul and Sheriff David Walcher – has been working with a coalition of community leaders, including doctors and administrators from Kaiser Permanente, to address the staggering statistics of abuse of prescription pain medications, such as oxycodone.

The task force, which includes representatives from Tri-County Health Department; Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health, the University of Colorado School of Pharmacy and other community organizations, is working together to address this problem through enhanced law enforcement; doctor and pharmacist education; public awareness and legislative action.

Kaiser Permanente Vice President of Government, External Relations and Research, Jandel Allen-Davis, MD co-chairs the task force.

“Many people are needlessly dying or being harmed by this growing prescription drug abuse problem. Reversing this disturbing trend is going to require input and action from multiple stakeholders, including

policy makers, elected officials, community organizations, businesses, and the medical community, including patients and their care providers,” Allen-Davis said.

Arapahoe County residents can help battle this problem by properly disposing of unused prescription drugs. The Arapahoe County Sheriff’s Office will staff three locations Saturday:

- Kaiser Permanente, 5555 E. Arapahoe Road, Centennial, 80122.
- Centennial Medical Plaza, 14200 E. Arapahoe Road, (north parking lot), Centennial 80112
- Smoky Hill Library, 5430 S. Biscay Circle, Aurora, 80015

Unused prescription and over-the-counter drugs will be accepted. Items which cannot be accepted include needles and/or sharps, mercury (thermometers), oxygen containers, chemotherapy/radioactive substances, pressured canisters and illicit drugs.

In addition to the locations offered by the Arapahoe County Sheriff’s Office, additional Take Back locations will be available throughout Arapahoe County, and include:

- Smoky Hill Library, 5430 S. Biscay Circle, Aurora, 80015
- The Medical Center of Aurora, north parking lot on the south campus, 1501 S. Potomac St., Aurora 80012
- Saddle Rock Emergency Room, 22500 E. Dry Creek Road, Aurora, 80016
- Aurora Police Department, 15001 E. Alameda Parkway, Aurora, 80012
- Buckley Air Force Base Commissary, 365 N. Telluride Building #1, Aurora 80011
- Cherry Hills Village Police Department, 2460 E. Quincy Ave., Cherry Hills Village, 80113
- Glendale Police Department, 950 S. Birch St., Glendale, 80246
- Greenwood Village Police Department, 6060 S. Quebec St., Greenwood Village, 80111
- Littleton Police Department, 2255 W. Berry Ave., Littleton, 80120
- Sheridan Police Department, (west side of building) 4101 S. Federal Blvd., Sheridan, 80110

For a complete list of locations, visit [www.dea.gov](http://www.dea.gov).

In Colorado, according to the Center for Behavioral Health Statistics, since 2004 there has been a 164 percent increase in emergency room visits for overdoses of pain killing drugs. During the last 10 years alone, Arapahoe County has seen an 86 percent increase in drug-related deaths, according to Coroner Dr. Kelly Lear-Kaul.

“Both locally and nationwide more people die from drug overdoses than from motor vehicle crashes; in Arapahoe County in 2013, the number of drug-related deaths was more than three times that of motor vehicle-related deaths,” Lear-Kaul said. “Drug overdose deaths accounted for almost 22 percent of the cases over which my office had jurisdiction in 2013 and 83 percent of these deaths were directly related to prescription medications. These are preventable deaths and it is our responsibility to make every attempt to reduce these numbers.”

Since 2013, the task force is addressing the problem through:

- Aggressive enforcement of existing laws
- Improved medical research to develop non-addictive pain killers
- Better education programs for prescribing physicians
- Better education for young adults and the general public
- Better training of our first responders in drug intervention measures

- Better adherence to state-run electronic databases used to track prescribing and dispensing of controlled prescription drugs to patients
- Options for people to safely dispose of prescription and non-prescription drugs through secured permanent drop boxes in law enforcement facilities throughout Arapahoe County and drug disposal collection events.

The Sheriff's Office continues to participate with the Drug Enforcement Administration's Drug Takeback Days, which are held twice per year. To allow citizens to properly dispose of their medications without having to wait up to six months, in June the Sheriff's Office installed their own drug drop box in the Sheriff's Office Administration Building, 13101 E. Broncos Pkwy., Centennial.

During business hours, the public can dispose of unused prescription and non-prescription drugs. More information is available on the Sheriff's Office website [www.arapahoesherriff.org](http://www.arapahoesherriff.org).

Sheriff Walcher also is looking to other law enforcement agencies in the state of Colorado to follow this same practice.

"We want to get unused prescription drugs out of homes, where they could be abused, and disposed of properly," said Sheriff David Walcher, adding that he anticipates the Sheriff's Office will collect more than 700 pounds a year from the one drop box alone. "We will be reducing the risk of children or others obtaining these medications and potentially using them in an abusive and harmful, or deadly manner."

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