

Americans concerned about prescription painkiller addiction

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People support more education for doctors and regulations to limit abusive access, survey finds.

(HealthDay)—Most Americans are concerned about the abuse of narcotic painkillers, despite widespread use of these legal medications, new research suggests.

About one in four Americans reported taking a prescription painkiller—such as hydrocodone (Vicodin) or oxycodone (Percocet, Oxycontin)—within the past year, the study said.

Around 70 percent of Americans said they've been prescribed narcotic painkillers at some point in their life. And almost 20 percent admit they've taken painkillers prescribed for someone else, the study revealed.

"This study shows that many Americans have had direct experience

using [prescription pain relievers](#) and a sizable share have misused or abused these medications themselves, or have close friends or family members who have done so," study leader Colleen Barry, an associate professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said in a university news release.

At the same time, however, the researchers found that almost 60 percent of Americans believe abuse of these medications is a significant public health concern. That's similar to Americans' views on other public health concerns such as gun violence and tobacco use, the researchers said.

In 2012, drug overdoses, primarily involving [prescription painkillers](#), surpassed car crashes to become the leading cause of injury death, the researchers said. In addition, costs related to abuse of these drugs is estimated to be around \$50 billion a year.

The study, published in the Oct. 7 online edition of the journal *Addiction*, included a web-based public opinion survey. The researchers heard from more than 1,100 U.S. adults in February 2014.

Most people thought doctors prescribing these drugs were responsible for the current health crisis. Survey participants believed that patients are kept on these drugs for too long, and it was too easy to get more than one prescription for these drugs. Many respondents said that people don't realize how easy it is to become addicted to these medications.

The survey revealed wide support among Americans for policy changes proposed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, the American Medical Association and the Trust for America's Health.

"We think this is the perfect time to work on passing policies that can truly impact the crisis of prescription pain reliever abuse," study co-

author Emma "Beth" McGinty, an assistant professor at the Bloomberg School, said in the news release. "The issue has not yet been highly politicized like some [public health](#) issues such as the Affordable Care Act, gun violence or needle exchanges, so we may have an opportunity to stem this epidemic."

People who answered the survey supported additional training for doctors in how to control patients' pain and treat addiction. They also supported measures that keep patients from getting multiple painkiller prescriptions from different doctors, as well as rules that require pharmacists to check patients' identification before distributing [narcotic painkillers](#).

Two proposed changes lacked broad support, the findings showed. Slightly less than half of people surveyed wanted greater distribution of medications that can reverse an overdose of these painkilling medications. And only 39 percent supported more government spending on addiction treatment.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse has more about [prescription drug abuse](#).

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