AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

The President's Weekly Address
September 26, 2015

Hi, everybody. Today, September 26, is National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day. It's a day where you can safely, conveniently, and responsibly dispose of expired and unwanted prescription drugs at collection sites in your community.

Here's why this matters. More Americans now die every year from drug overdoses than they do in car crashes. And most of those deaths aren't due to drugs like cocaine or heroin, but rather prescription drugs. In 2013 alone, overdoses from prescription pain medications killed more than 16,000 Americans. And most young people who begin misusing prescription drugs don't buy them in some dark alley; they get them from the medicine cabinet.

If that's not a good enough reason to participate in National Prescription Drug Take-Back Day, here's another. Many prescription pain medications belong to the same class of drugs as heroin. In fact, four in five heroin users started out by misusing prescription drugs. And over the course of just 1 year, between 2013 and 2014, we saw a 33 percent increase in the number of heroin users.

All of this takes a terrible toll on too many families, in too many communities, all across the country, big and small, urban and rural. It strains law enforcement and treatment programs. It costs all of us in so many different ways.

That's why, 4 years ago, my administration unveiled a Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention Plan. We've been partnering with communities to combat overdoses, and we're seeing some promising results. That's why the budget I put forward this year would build on those efforts. It would make critical investments in things like drug monitoring programs, equipping more first responders to save more lives, and expanding medication-assisted treatment programs, including in our prisons.

In fact, getting smarter about how we address substance use disorders is a vital part of reforming our criminal justice system. Rather than keep spending billions of taxpayer dollars on needlessly long prison sentences for nonviolent drug offenders, we could save money and get better outcomes by getting treatment to those who need it. And we could use some of the savings to make sure the brave men and women of law enforcement have the resources they need to go after drug kingpins and violent gangs, disrupt the flow of drugs into our country, and address the real threats to our communities.

With no other disease do we expect people to wait until they're a danger to themselves or others to self-diagnose and seek treatment. So we should approach abuse as an opportunity to intervene, not incarcerate. And we all have a role to play here. Parents, we have to understand how important it is to talk to our kids and to safely store medications in the house. The medical community has to be engaged too, because better prescribing practices will make a difference.

And as a country, we have to keep working to reduce drug use through evidence-based treatment, prevention, and recovery. Because research shows it works. Courageous Americans show it works also, every single day. That's why the man I named to head the Office of National Drug Control Policy—Michael Botticelli—is a man in long-term recovery himself. He talks about it openly and honestly, precisely to strike down the shame and stigma that too often keep people from seeking care before it's too late.

This is something I'll be talking about more in the weeks to come in communities across the country. Because it's a challenge we can solve if we work together.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 2:05 p.m. on September 24 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on September 26. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 25, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on September 26.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Weekly addresses.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Botticelli, Michael P.

Subjects: Drug abuse and trafficking : Addiction treatment and reduction efforts; Drug abuse and trafficking : Education and prevention efforts; Holidays and special observances : Prescription Drug Take-Back Day, National; Law enforcement and crime : Sentencing requirements, reform; Law enforcement and crime : State and community law enforcement agencies, Federal support; White House Office : Drug Control Policy, Office of National.

DCPD Number: DCPD201500653.