Safe storage and disposal are important parts of reducing abuse and misuse of prescription opioids, because opioid misuse often starts in the home. In fact, 53 percent of those who misused prescription pain relievers in 2017 said that they obtained the medicine from a friend or relative.¹

Women play a critical role in promoting the safe storage and disposal of prescription medication. Recent data show that women are more likely to be prescribed opioids for chronic pain and chronic conditions.² Additionally, they are responsible for approximately 80 percent of the healthcare decisions for their families and are more likely to serve as family caregivers than men.³,⁴ In this role, they are more likely to fill prescriptions and keep track of dosages, as well as oversee the safe storage and disposal for others.

If you or a family member receive an opioid prescription, make sure to follow the steps below to safely store and dispose of the medicine.

What You Can Do to Safely Store and Dispose of Prescription Opioids

- Store all opioids in their original packaging, so you retain the prescription information, directions for use and expiration date.
- Be sure to keep these medicines out of reach of young children, who can accidentally consume or abuse the prescription opioids.
- Keep opioids in a secured cabinet or lockbox away from family members and house guests.
- Be sure to monitor the medicine you take and how much you have left so you will know if there is any medicine missing.
- Consider using a metered pill dispenser system with a timer or a smartphone-enabled pill box to keep you on schedule, prevent accidental overdose, and lock when it is not dosing time to protect others from taking pills.
- When you are done using your prescription opioids, follow disposal directions you received with your medicines. If you did not receive directions, ask your healthcare professional or pharmacist about disposal or consult the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines.
- If you wear a fentanyl patch, consider covering it with adhesive film to make sure it doesn’t fall off and regularly check to make sure it is still in place. The FDA recommends that patients periodically check their patch to ensure it is still sticking to the skin properly.
- Take advantage of programs that accept unused medications for proper disposal. Find the disposal location in your area by visiting www.AgainstOpioidAbuse.org/disposal.

Taking Action to Address the Opioid Crisis

Making an impact on the opioid epidemic in the U.S. requires multiple approaches and collaborations. HealthyWomen, an AAOA partner, has assembled a toolkit intended to help state legislators (and others) interested in addressing the opioid epidemic in the U.S. Resources for strengthening families and communities by improving access to treatment for opioid use disorder can be downloaded here.

². https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)31203-0/fulltext