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CVS Health expands drug-disposal program to Arizona

Angela Forburger, Arizona Republic Published 6:00 a.m. MT June 22, 2018



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The U.S. House Homeland Security Subcommittee visits Phoenix to discuss opioid crisis, Wednesday, May 30, 2018. Tom Tingle, The Republic | azcentral.com

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CVS Health is expanding drop-off boxes for unused medications at 13 store locations across Arizona, the company said this week.

The new disposal units will be located inside CVS Pharmacy locations, providing sites for disposing of opioids and other medications that could be misused if they are left in medicine cabinets, the company said in announcing the plan on Wednesday.

The new Arizona boxes are among 750 disposal units being added to CVS Pharmacy locations across the country, officials said. The company did not specify which stores would add the boxes.

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Thomas Moriarty, a CVS Health spokesman, said the company has also donated nearly 900 disposal units to police departments nationwide. The company has collected more than 350,000 pounds of unwanted medication at the sites.

"The opioid crisis is a complicated problem that didn't begin overnight and won't be solved overnight," Moriarty said, during a press conference at a CVS Pharmacy in Phoenix.

Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich lauded the company's effort.

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Mark Brnovich
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We continue to work together to combat the opioid crisis. Prescription drop boxes are being installed inside CVS pharmacies throughout Arizona. @phoenixpolice @CVSinAction
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"As attorney general, I can only do what's within my authority and my jurisdiction," Brnovich said. "That's why we need to have community partners like the Phoenix Police Department (and) like CVS to make sure we are filling all the gaps in our community."

Brnovich said three Arizonans die every day from opioid overdose and 8,500 people in Arizona overdosed on opioids in 2017, highlighting the importance of a safe disposal program.

"We know that so many times, it's friends, it's family, it's grandparents, it's our kids (who) end up getting access to these dangerous opioids," Brnovich said. "We want to make sure they're not available."

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In addition to the new disposal units at CVS Pharmacy locations, CVS Health donated units to local law-enforcement agencies in Kingman, Tolleson and Welton.

Police and sheriff's departments provide a safe place for the community to dispose of their medications, but Sgt. Tommy Thompson, spokesman for the Phoenix Police Department, said most people would likely be more comfortable going to CVS to dispose of their medication.

"We have a location where people go every day — a CVS Pharmacy," Thompson said. "Where sometimes (people) may be a little apprehensive about going to the police department, they can come here."

CVS Health added that it has worked to increase access to the opioid overdose-reversal drug naloxone in 46 states, including Arizona.



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To continue to combat the problem of overdoses, Brnovich said that hundreds of members of law enforcement have trained to help prevent opioid abuse and have worked on administering naloxone.

"We need to all work together to continue to be part of the solution and make sure we're not a part of the problem," Brnovich said. "Only when (the) government can work with its community in the private sector can we solve the crisis that's facing this country today."

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CVS Health also said it is awarding grants to two Arizona non-profit organizations working to fight opioid abuse.

ICAN, a youth-service organization in Chandler, and El Rio Santa Cruz Neighborhood Health Center in Tucson will receive \$25,000 and \$85,000, respectively, to support substance-abuse prevention efforts.

"The opioid epidemic has no single cause and it doesn't discriminate," Moriarty said. "It exists in our cities, in the suburbs, and across rural America."



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