



August 11, 2021

Dear Governor Abbott, Lieutenant Governor Patrick and Speaker Phelan:

On behalf of the organizations listed below, we respectfully request that during the current Special Legislative Session you appropriate \$5.4 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 for the 2022–23 biennium to fulfill the Texas State Board of Pharmacy's (TSBP) exceptional item request to fund the Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP). It is critical that these funds be appropriated before September 1, 2021, to prevent any PMP usage interruptions.

Opioid abuse has skyrocketed since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The American Medical Association reports that overdoses related to prescription opioids and heroin remain high and also are increasingly adulterated with illicit fentanyl.¹ In a large, cross-sectional study published in *JAMA Psychiatry* on Feb. 3, 2021, that analyzed nearly 190 million emergency department (ED) visits, researchers found significantly higher rates of visits to EDs for opioid overdoses during the months of March to October 2020 when compared against the same dates in 2019. The study found that, from mid-April onward, the weekly rates of ED visits for drug overdoses increased by up to 45% when compared against the same period in 2019. Overall emergency department visits for opioid overdoses were up 28.8% year over year between 2019 and 2020.²

To increase utilization of the PMP and help combat the opioid crisis, the Legislature mandated all prescribers and dispensers (except veterinarians) to check a patient's prescription history in the PMP before prescribing or dispensing an opioid, barbiturate, benzodiazepine, or carisoprodol, and mandated pharmacists to report all dispensed controlled substances records to the PMP no later than the next business day after the prescription is filled. The mandate is meeting its intended effect by reducing doctor shopping behavior as indicated by the reduction of TSBP's 5-5-5 threshold alerts (indication to a provider of when a patient receives five or more controlled substance prescriptions, written by five prescribers, and had all the prescriptions filled at five or more pharmacies).³ As of August 31, 2020, 88.9% of pharmacists, 72.2% of physician assistants and 69.6% of physicians in Texas were registered PMP users. This equated to 59 million user searches of the PMP in Fiscal Year 2020⁴, thus assisting providers in making medically appropriate prescribing and dispensing decisions.

To assist providers in meeting the mandate, the 86th Legislature appropriated general revenue in the 2019 Supplemental Appropriations bill (S.B. 500) to fund the three items that were requested by the TSBP during the Regular Session as an exceptional item for the 2022–2023 biennium:

¹ <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/issue-brief-increases-in-opioid-related-overdose.pdf>

² <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2775991>

³ Joint Interim Committee on Prescribing & Dispensing Controlled Substances Interim Report to the 86th Legislature

⁴ TSBP's Fiscal Year 2020 PMP Data One Pager

1. Integration of the PMP in electronic health record systems (EHR): \$2.1 million annually
Providing integration of the PMP into prescribers' and dispensers' EHR dramatically increases the efficiency with which providers have access to the PMP. Without integration, providers would be required to operate multiple systems when dispensing and/or prescribing of controlled substances is involved with patient care, creating clinical workflow issues that will limit access to care including in safety net emergency hospitals. **Of the 59 million provider PMP searches in fiscal year 2020, 48.5 million (82%) of those were searches from an integrated EHR.**⁵
2. NarxCare: \$400,750 annually
NarxCare is a PMP enhancement that analyzes patient health history to provide dispensers and prescribers with a patient addiction risk score and an interactive visualization of usage patterns to help identify risk. NarxCare also allows for provider-to-provider messaging within the PMP so that patient care notes can be shared electronically.
3. Clinical Alerts: \$20,000 annually
Clinical alerts provide notifications within the PMP to prescribers and dispensers when patients meet certain controlled substances usage thresholds. For example, a provider would receive an automatic alert from the PMP if a patient received both an opioid and a benzodiazepine, a drug mixture that can increase the likelihood of an overdose.

We look forward to working with you on our continued efforts to address the ongoing opioid crisis. It is paramount that these items remain funded during the 2022–2023 biennium to build on the progress and successes of the state's PMP. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

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cc:

The Honorable Jane Nelson
The Honorable Greg Bonnen

⁵ TSBP's Fiscal Year 2020 PMP Data One Pager