

Reducing Unused Medications Act of 2016
Senators Elizabeth Warren and Shelley Moore Capito
Representatives Katherine Clark and Steve Stivers

The Reducing Unused Medications Act is bipartisan and bicameral legislation that will increase flexibility in filling opioid prescriptions. We know that many patients don't use all of the opioids they take home, and we know where those unused pills end up; the National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that more than 70 percent of adults who misuse prescription opioids get them from friends or relatives.¹

One promising measure to reduce the number of unused pills is to permit the partial filling of opioid prescriptions. By allowing partial fills, patients will be able to have a pharmacist fill only part of a prescription and to return for the remainder if their pain persists. This flexibility can help reduce the number of unused pills in circulation and stem the growth of substance misuse, diversion and overdose.

Current Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) regulations permit drugs in schedules III, IV, and V to be partially filled² but the regulations are narrower and less clear for schedule II drugs, including prescription opioids.³ This legislation will resolve any ambiguity and clear the way for states considering partial fill policies to act.

The Reducing Unused Medications Act amends Section 309(a) of the Controlled Substances Act (pertaining to prescribing of scheduled substances) to allow partial filling of a schedule II drugs if requested by a doctor of patient. To ensure open communication between pharmacists, physicians, and patients, physicians will be notified each time a prescription is partially filled. Partial fills will not be allowed past the date that the full prescription would have run out (i.e., a prescription for a 30-day supply may only yield partial fills for up to 30 days).

This will help to limit the number of unused painkillers in medicine cabinets across the country and can be an important tool in our effort to address the opioid epidemic.

¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse, "Popping Pills: Prescription Drug Abuse in America," January 2014, (<http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/popping-pills-prescription-drug-abuse-in-america>)

² 21 CFR §1306.23

³ 21 CFR §1306.13