

# Prescribed to Death Launch – Pittsburgh

Debbie Hersman remarks

Kick off @ 12:40pm

Thank you for joining us as we kick off the first stop on a national tour of Prescribed to Death in Pittsburgh. I am especially grateful to the **Ray and Joneen Betler, Kent and Martha McElhattan** and **John and Becky Surma** and their families who made memorial visit to Pittsburgh possible. Ray, Kent and John have all served as National Safety Council board members, and we are so grateful for their dedication and support.

A huge thank you goes out to the **University of Pittsburgh** and Chancellor emeritus **Mark Nordenberg** for graciously hosting the memorial and making it accessible not just to Pitt students, but to the public.

We are here today because it's impossible to turn on the news without hearing opioids mentioned at least once every single day.

According to a 2017 report from [DEA Philadelphia Division and the University of Pittsburgh](#), "the opioid crisis in Pennsylvania and across the United States is a public health and safety emergency."

In 2016, over 4600 lives were lost across Pennsylvania to drug overdoses, 85% of which involved an opioid. To put this into perspective, Pennsylvania now ranks 4<sup>th</sup> in the nation for opioid overdoses. And in the past decade, fatal overdose rates for the college-aged set (ages 18-24) has doubled.

These numbers are shocking. And while the numbers are important, they don't tell the whole story.

It's about the faces you'll see on the Memorial wall.

Our recent NSC survey shows that Americans still don't understand the risks associated with opioid prescriptions. For those with an opioid prescription, two-thirds are not concerned about possible side effects, including addiction.

That is why we are here – to educate and offer solutions to stop everyday killers from ravaging our communities.

We want everyone to walk away from this exhibit doing two things.

**The first thing is talk with your doctor or pharmacist about the risks of opioids.**

We found that one third of those who are prescribed them, don't even realize their medication is an opioid drug.

The free **'Warn Me' labels** can help us educate ourselves and others about the dangers of opioids and to find alternatives. Thank you Ray Belter for pushing **Wabtec** to order 5,000 cards for each of their U.S. based employees. I encourage other employers in the area to reach out to us and get free labels at [NSC.org/TakeAction](http://NSC.org/TakeAction)

The change starts with us. We have to be our own best advocates. I think about all the families that could benefit from having an open discussion about opioids.

Let me tell you about my son Taylor.

**Taylor** is 16 and had wisdom tooth surgery last year. Among the post-op instructions and materials, he received a six-day prescription for tramadol. I asked the doctor's assistant who gave me the script if it was for an opioid drug, and she said no. When I went to get it filled, I asked the pharmacist if it was an opioid. She also said no. Then she said – well, let me double check with the pharmacy manager. The manager finally acknowledged that yes, tramadol is an opioid drug.

If I had a **warn me label** like this one (HOLD UP INSURANCE CARD) it would have prepared me for that conversation and it would have prepared the providers to have that conversation with me.

After talking with your doctors,

**the second thing we want everyone to do is clear out your medicine cabinets.**

We know that 64 percent of users don't get their pills from a valid prescription. Many obtain them from friends or family, so removing pills from circulation is crucial – especially given that many report they flush rather than dispose of their medication properly in the Northeast Region.

That's why we partnered with **Stericycle**, our Exclusive Waste Disposal Partner. The postage paid Stericycle Seal & Send envelopes allow you to send in your unused medications for proper disposal.

I have three teenage boys at home. I used the Stericycle Seal & Send envelope to get unused medications out of my home and I encourage you to do the same.

One quarter of our neighbors, our co-workers, and our family members either are addicted themselves, know someone who is, or know someone who has died as a result. Here in Pittsburgh, I know it's even more prevalent. We are here to put a face on the epidemic and help prevent future tragedies.

This memorial portrays the 22,000 people who perished just from opioid prescription painkillers and fentanyl in 2015. This year, there are even more families affected as those numbers continue to skyrocket.

We are incredibly grateful to all our survivor advocates, like **Michelle Lyman** who is here with us, for helping transform their pain and loss into helping others see clearly.

The impact of Stop Everyday Killers doesn't end here. We are planning stops in Georgia, Ohio, Washington D.C., and New York. The more momentum we build, the more places we can go to help curb our national epidemic.

By spreading awareness, and working together to educate others on the dangers of opioids, eliminate them from circulation, and empower everyday heroes to take action, we can stop everyday killers.

It is now my honor to introduce **Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto**, who recognizes the importance of curbing the opioid epidemic, and providing treatment and responsible solutions to our ongoing crisis. Mayor Peduto has served Pittsburgh for over 20 years as a city council staffer, Councilman, and now Mayor. Since taking office in 2013, he's worked tirelessly to transform Pittsburgh into a hub for innovation and resilience. Please join me in welcoming Mayor Peduto.