



Citizen Science: Naloxone Availability in Allegheny County Pharmacies

Prepared for:
Allegheny County Health Department

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A. INTRODUCTION

Citizen science equips community members to take action and conduct meaningful research that contributes to a larger project with numerous data points. The purpose of the Naloxone Availability in Allegheny County Pharmacies Project conducted by students at the University of Pittsburgh was to increase naloxone accessibility for Allegheny County residents by identifying where naloxone can be purchased, disseminating the locations online via *OverdoseFreePA.pitt.edu*, and laying the foundation for subsequent outreach efforts to boost Allegheny County pharmacy participation in Act 139.

B. METHODS

B.1. Citizen Scientists

Panthercare is a University of Pittsburgh student-led organization collaborating on public health initiatives with healthcare professionals and stakeholders in Allegheny County. The Program Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) at the University of Pittsburgh, School of Pharmacy, sponsored Panthercare and provided administrative support throughout this endeavor. In order to complete this project, seven members of Panthercare were recruited to help on this report:

B.2. Pharmacy Selection

Pharmacies that were surveyed included chain pharmacies, independently owned pharmacies, and pharmacies that operated out of hospitals. Pharmacies were nonrandomized and selected in part based on proximity to public transportation lines, in order to survey pharmacies in person. Additionally, pharmacies that were located outside of viable public transportation routes were contacted via phone. This final report examines all 342 operational pharmacies in Allegheny County.

B.3. Survey Design

Panthercare representatives spoke with both pharmacists and pharmacy technicians and were instructed to ask the following questions:

- 1) Are you (pharmacist) aware of Act 139?
- 2) Does your pharmacy shelve naloxone?
- 3) Does insurance cover the cost of naloxone or do customers pay out of pocket?

Representatives were not provided a script, as interactions were encouraged to be natural, with fluid conversation. Members were also instructed to take note of the pharmacist's body language, in the case of in person visits, tone of voice, and overall positivity or negativity related to the conversation. Following the conversations, members reported on the pharmacist's answers and their interactions with pharmacists.

Specialty pharmacies and some pharmacies that operated out of hospitals did not dispense naloxone to the lay population, therefore their answers were listed as "not applicable" (Table 1).

C. RESULTS

Panthercare surveyed all 342 operational pharmacies in Allegheny County. Most pharmacies that were surveyed (69%) were aware of and honored the standing order for naloxone (Table 1). 49% of the pharmacies reported that they had naloxone in stock and available for purchase that same day (Figure 1). Narcan® intranasal spray was the form most commonly in stock and available for purchase (SI Table 1). There was a difference in responses between independent and chain pharmacies (Table 2). Of the independent pharmacies, 42% indicated that they were aware of the standing order for naloxone, compared to 85% of the chain pharmacies. Many chain pharmacies stated that there were company policies in place, which may explain why more chain pharmacies indicated that they were aware of the standing order.

Questions regarding insurance appeared to produce the most varied responses; 30% of independent pharmacies reported that they would accept insurance for the standing order, while 45% indicated that it would depend on the customers' insurance plan; 59% of chain pharmacies indicated that they would accept insurance for the standing order, while 10% said that it would depend on the customers' insurance plan. Lastly, 33% of independent pharmacies indicated that they do not carry naloxone and would have to order it for customers to pick up at a later time; 35% of chain pharmacies reported that they did not have naloxone in stock and would have to place an order for the medication.

Panthercare representatives reported a wide range of attitudes, body languages, and cooperativity throughout the pharmacist surveys that could not be correlated with the pharmacy chain, location, or person interviewed.

Table 1. Survey responses of Allegheny County pharmacies.

| Question | Yes | No | Some* | Not Applicable** |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Are you aware of the standing order for naloxone and will you honor it? | 234/342 (69%) | 55/342 (16%) | | 52/342 (15%) |
| Will you accept insurance for the naloxone standing order? | 108/342 (32%) | 41/342 (12%) | 119/342 (35%) | 73/342 (21%) |
| Do you currently have the naloxone products covered by the standing order in stock and available today (Evzio®, Narcan®, naloxone 2mg/2ml luer lok+atomizer)? | 168/342 (49%) | 117/342 (34%) | | 56/342 (16%) |

*These pharmacies indicated that they process naloxone insurance claims on a case-by-case basis.

**Not Applicable refers to specialty pharmacies that do not dispense naloxone or private, hospital pharmacies that only dispense medication for in-hospital use.

Table 2. Breakdown of Allegheny pharmacy survey responses by independent and chain pharmacies.

| Question | Independent Pharmacy | | Chain Pharmacy | | Not Applicable |
|---|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Yes | No | Yes | No | |
| Are you aware of the standing order for naloxone and will you honor it? | 54/128 (42%) | 26/128 (20%) | 180/213 (85%) | 29/213 (14%) | 52/342 (15%) |
| Will you accept insurance for the naloxone standing order? | 39/128 (30%) | 32/128 (25%) | 126/213 (59%) | 65/213 (31%) | 73/342 (21%) |
| Do you currently have the naloxone products covered by the standing order in stock and available today (Evzio®, Narcan®, naloxone 2mg/2ml luer lok+atomizer)? | 38/128 (30%) | 42/128 (33%) | 130/213 (61%) | 75/213 (35%) | 56/342 (16%) |

**Not Applicable refers to specialty pharmacies that do not dispense naloxone or private, hospital pharmacies that only dispense medication for in-hospital use.

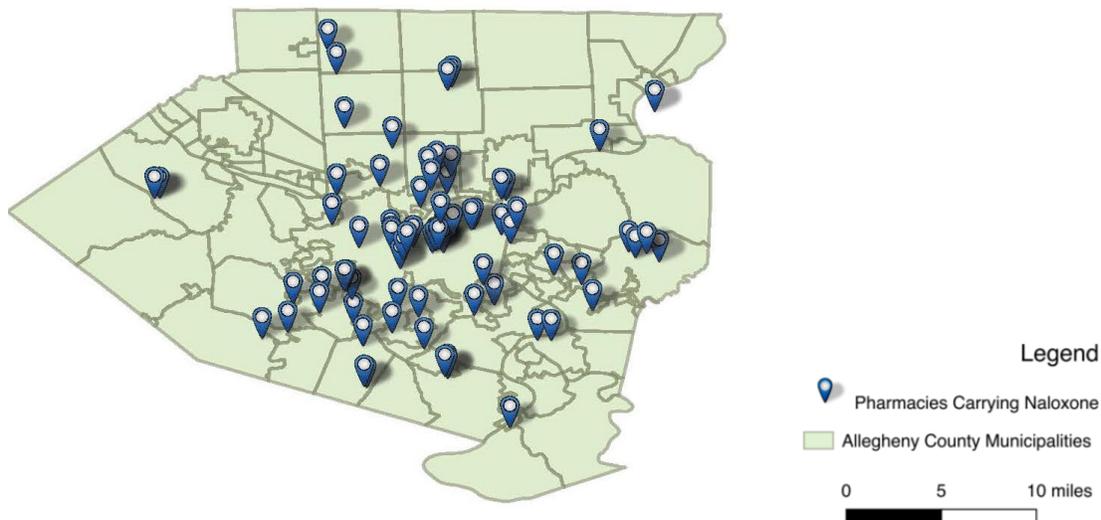


Figure 1. In Allegheny County, 168 pharmacies currently stock Naloxone.

D. DISCUSSION

Panthercare was able to survey all 342 pharmacies in Allegheny County and can report that 234 (69%) of pharmacies were aware of Act 139. During the interviews, Panthercare representatives were repeatedly told by many of the large companies (CVS, Rite Aid, Walgreens, Giant Eagle) that their chain has policies that recognize the state’s standing order for naloxone. For example, Rite Aid advertised the standing order with signs on pharmacy counters, and Panthercare representatives noted that this made them feel more comfortable in approaching the pharmacist to ask them about naloxone. However, many chain pharmacies were not able to convey what the naloxone policies were, and there was considerable variability in response to the survey questions amongst pharmacies from

the same chain. The variability was observed in independently owned pharmacies as well (SI Table 2).

Barriers to carrying naloxone in the store were discussed by the pharmacists interviewed. Some pharmacists were hesitant to stock naloxone due to the high prices required in batch purchasing, claiming that demand is too low to justify purchasing stock quantities. Other pharmacists opt to refer customers to other pharmacies to fill prescriptions for naloxone. An additional barrier to distributing naloxone is the lack of education around reimbursement for naloxone filled through the standing order, oftentimes not knowing if or which insurances would cover naloxone.

Time constraints and transportation barriers hindered Panthercare's ability to survey each pharmacy in-person. As a result, Panthercare conducted many interviews via phone call. Albeit this method has increased efficiency, phone interviews inherently sacrifice fidelity of the simulated pharmacist-customer interaction and preclude the transcription of detailed notes regarding factors tone, body language and other forms of nonverbal communication.