

According to the Drug Abuse Warning Network, emergency room visits related to nonmedical use of prescription and over-the-counter medicines increased 60% between 2004 and 2007.<sup>1</sup>

Because prescription and over-the-counter medicines are legal and meant to be used to lessen symptoms and treat illnesses, people perceive them as less dangerous than illegal drugs. These medications are safe when used as directed. However, misuse of any medication—whether the medication is taken incorrectly or by someone other than the prescribed patient—can have serious adverse health effects.

The 2010 *Greater Cincinnati Community Health Status Survey* asked adults in our region a number of questions about misuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

## Most Use Prescription Painkillers, Over-the-Counter Drugs Correctly

The large majority of Greater Cincinnati adults said they have never used a prescription painkiller (97%)<sup>2</sup> or over-the-

<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. *Drug Abuse Warning Network, 2007: National Estimates of Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits*. Rockville, MD, 2010. Available at <https://dawninfo.samhsa.gov/files/ED2007/DAWN2k7ED.pdf>.  
<sup>2</sup> Prescription painkillers include Vicodin®, OxyContin®, Percocet®, and others.

## Adults in Greater Cincinnati who used prescription painkillers or over-the-counter drugs when they didn't need them or they just wanted to feel good



counter drug (98%)<sup>3</sup> when they didn't need it to control pain or they just wanted to feel good.

While only 2–3% of adults in the region reported they had ever used a prescription painkiller or over-the-counter drug when they didn't need it, adults in our region's rural Kentucky counties<sup>4</sup> reported higher rates of misuse: 10% of rural Kentucky adults reported they had ever used a prescription painkiller and 6% reported they had ever used an over-the-counter drug when they didn't need it.

## Current Misuse of Prescription Painkillers, Over-the-Counter Drugs

While misusing a prescription painkiller or over-the-counter drug once or twice may have adverse consequences, regular

<sup>3</sup> Over-the-counter medications include cold medicines, sleeping pills, "stay-awake" pills, and others.

<sup>4</sup> The rural Kentucky counties in the region are Bracken, Carroll, Gallatin, Owen, and Pendleton.

misuse causes the most serious problems. This is measured by asking people if they have used a prescription painkiller or over-the-counter drug in the last month when they didn't need it or they just wanted to feel good.

About 1% of Greater Cincinnati adults said they had used a prescription painkiller (1%) or over-the-counter drug (<1%) in the last month when they didn't need to or they just wanted to feel good.

This is compared to 2% of adults nationally who had used a prescription painkiller recreationally in the last month.<sup>5</sup> There are currently no national data on misuse of over-the-counter drugs by adults.

<sup>5</sup> National data are from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)'s National Survey on Drug Use and Health, which can be found at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/nsduhLatest.htm>.