



Comprehensive Alcohol, Drug and Behavioral Health Services

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Background on Heroin/Prescription Drugs

Many are surprised to learn that heroin and prescription painkillers are variations of the same drug: opiates. The vast majority of Arapahoe House clients with a heroin addiction started using painkillers like Morphine, Codeine, Vicodin, OxyContin and others and then migrated to heroin.

A likely path from pills to heroin is that a user has access to pills via prescriptions. Either doctors or health insurance cuts them off, or, their building dependency exceeds what they can get easily via prescriptions and insurance. Then, they start looking for an alternative.

Colorado Data:

Colorado has the second-worst rate of pain pill abuse in the U.S. (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2013) and Colorado deaths involving the use of prescription opioids nearly quadrupled between 2000 and 2011 (Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment).

This fact sheet outlines the scope of the problem in Colorado the best: <http://peerassistanceservices.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Fact-Sheet-2015-Final.pdf>

Arapahoe House has seen dramatic increases in prescription drug and heroin admissions:

- Heroin admissions at Arapahoe House have quintupled in the last six years. (179 to 947, primary)
- The number of clients we've seen for prescription drug addiction has more than tripled since 2008. (147 admissions in 2008 to 560 in 2014)
- Prescription painkiller (opiate) admissions have sextupled since 2008. (72 admissions in 2008 to 454 in 2014)

Why are prescription drugs so dangerous?

- There is a common misconception that it's safer to misuse and abuse prescription medications rather than illegal drugs.
- Prescription drugs are more dangerous because they are prescribed by a doctor, a person of trust, and the user can oftentimes rationalize that they are acceptable to abuse.
- The majority (70 percent) of Americans 12 and older who abuse prescription drugs get them from friends and family, including from their home medicine cabinets.

Arapahoe House provides substance abuse treatment and mental health services to vulnerable individuals and families in metro Denver. Since 1975, Arapahoe House has been empowering members of our community to find help, hope and healing from drugs and alcohol. With 13 locations providing more than 20 specialized services, Arapahoe House is Colorado's leading nonprofit provider of quality, affordable drug and alcohol treatment.

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