

# Pharmacist-initiated naloxone and syringe furnishing in California



Among communities with a high risk of opioid overdose, **naloxone has the potential to save many lives** when used quickly. However, its success is contingent on the medication being **readily available** to those who could benefit.

Access to **clean syringes and needles** for people who inject drugs **mitigates the risk for transmission** of hepatitis B/C virus (HBV/HCV), HIV, other bloodborne diseases, skin and soft tissue infection, and infectious endocarditis.



**Pharmacies are widely accessible and play an important role as partners in community-based public health initiatives.**

Since 2016, California’s Business and Professions Code 4052.01 (BPC 4052.01) has allowed licensed pharmacists to **furnish naloxone**, an opioid overdose reversal medication, **without an outside provider’s prescription**.

In 2012, Senate Bill 41 (SB 41) authorized licensed pharmacists in California to **furnish needles and syringes without an outside provider’s prescription**.

In 2022, we conducted an **online survey of California pharmacists and pharmacy students** to assess pharmacy provision of critical health services, including naloxone and syringes.

Among 365 currently practicing pharmacists and pharmacy students in **community pharmacies**:



**58%**

reported that their pharmacy **furnishes naloxone without an outside provider’s prescription**.



**58%**

reported that their pharmacy **provides access to syringes**.

When comparing naloxone provision by **community pharmacy type**:



**73%**

of respondents from **national chains** reported naloxone furnishing



**41%**

of respondents from **independently owned pharmacies**.

Though these numbers are modestly higher than earlier estimates, they still suggest that **nearly half of community pharmacies do not provide these evidence-based, life-saving interventions** several years after the state enacted enabling legislation.

## Policy Implications

- Pharmacies are a **critical access point** for health services in the community, yet there are **opportunities to expand implementation of naloxone and syringe furnishing in pharmacies**.
- Pharmacist furnishing of naloxone remains important for **equitable access**. Although the FDA approved over-the-counter naloxone in 2023, copays for prescription naloxone can be more affordable than purchasing naloxone over-the-counter.
- Suboptimal naloxone and syringe furnishing at independently owned pharmacies suggests the need for further **awareness, training, and support for implementation**.
- Though syringe availability is likely overestimated (i.e., survey responses may include provision via outside prescription), our findings suggest that **current implementation falls short of the goal of widespread access to syringes** in community pharmacies.
- Comprehensive harm reduction policies save lives. Providing pharmacists with **appropriate training and resources** to offer naloxone and syringes without an outside provider’s prescription can help **reduce drug-related harms and deaths** in their communities.

### Authors

Maria Garcia-Chinn, Lauren Hunter, Laura Packel, Sandra McCoy (UC Berkeley)  
 Mary Gutierrez, Jerika Lam (Chapman University)  
 Talia Puzantian (Keck Graduate Institute)  
 Raiza Beltran, Ayako Miyashita Ochoa (UCLA)  
 California Pharmacist Study team



CALIFORNIA  
 HIV/AIDS POLICY  
 RESEARCH CENTERS