

Alaska State Legislature

Session:
Alaska State Capitol, Rm. 104
Juneau, AK 99801-1182
Office: (907) 465-2693



Interim:
145 Main St Loop
Kenai, AK 99611
Office: (907) 283-2030

Representative Justin Ruffridge District 7 - Kenai/Soldotna

House Bill 56 Sponsor Statement

Veterinarian Exemption from the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP)

The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) was established in Alaska to track the dispensing of controlled substance medications in the state of Alaska. Currently, all 50 states have a drug monitoring program for this purpose with Missouri being the last to join the other 49 states in 2021. In the State of Alaska, all prescribing license types are required to register, review and report to the PDMP including veterinarians. This is in stark contrast to most other states as 33 other states exempt veterinarians from PDMP requirements. Ten of these states originally required veterinarians to report to the PDMP but have since exempted veterinarians.

The Alaska PDMP is a tool to aid practitioners that dispense controlled substances in decision making. Before states began implementing PDMP programs patients could see multiple prescribers and visit multiple pharmacies to obtain controlled substance prescriptions. Medications with high abuse potential (labeled by the DEA as Class II narcotics) were often the targets or individuals engaged in this practice. Since the implementation of these programs, "doctor shopping" or "pharmacy shopping" (as that came to be called) has become much more difficult.

Veterinarians in Alaska are keenly aware the PDMP is an incredibly important tool for reducing opioid misuse and over-prescribing and are committed to ensuring the safe use and prescribing of these medications. However, there are three main reasons why other states have made exemptions.

In Alaska, veterinarians are mandated to both query and/or report information under the owner of the animal. This poses a major privacy concern. Veterinarians are not included under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). Access to human medical information and human medical treatment is not within the purview of veterinary training or regulations. However they are currently required by their licensing board and the State of Alaska to perform this task. When asked, many pet owners are not aware that their veterinarian would have access to any part of their medical information, and they are often concerned about veterinarian access to this private information.

Furthermore, animal patients themselves cannot be effectively tracked through PDMPs. Animals do not have a unique identifier such as a social security number or even date of birth. The animal's name may be changed over time, the date of birth is often not known, and the owner of the pet may change over time.

Finally, veterinarians do not use narcotic (Class II) controlled substances with regularity. In fact, a 2017 study showed that veterinary dispensing of opioids accounted for 0.34% of all opioid prescribing in the United States.

Exempting veterinarians from the PDMP will not diminish the judicious use of controlled substances that is already practiced by veterinarians and regulated by the Drug Enforcement Agency and the state licensing board. Exempting veterinarians from the PDMP will allow veterinarians to provide timely and appropriate medical management for each individual patient without burdensome statutory requirements that test the boundaries of human patient privacy. This bill would increase the efficiency of the PDMP for its intended purpose by allowing for more accurate interpretation of prescription data and prescribing trends in human medicine. Please join me in supporting House Bill 56 to exempt veterinarians from the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program.