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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5710 and H.R. 5809
Subcommittee on Health
July 22, 2010

Thank you, Chairman Pallone, for holding this hearing and this afternoon's markup.

Prescription drug abuse is a serious and escalating public health problem. As we will hear today, a new study suggests that there has been a staggering 400% increase in hospital admissions for individuals needing treatment for prescription drug abuse.

A large portion of those who abuse prescription drugs access them in the home. This points to at least one obvious solution: we need to do everything we can to give people a way to get prescription drugs they are not using out of the home as soon as possible.

The Safe Drug Disposal Act introduced by Reps. Inslee, Smith, and Stupak will go a long way toward this goal. I applaud them for their leadership on this issue.

This legislation will promote the expansion of drug take-back programs that can safely dispose of unwanted drugs.

These programs will also have another important effect: they reduce the impact on the environment. When people do not have a safe place outside of the home where they can dispose of their unused drugs, they typically flush them down the toilet, causing them to ultimately end up in our waterways. We don't yet have a full picture of the human health and environmental impacts, but this raises serious concerns regarding drinking water and aquatic ecosystems.

This morning we are also looking at the role of state Prescription Drug Monitoring programs. These programs track prescriptions so that states can identify and address drug diversion or abuse. They help law enforcement, but they also help doctors and public health authorities prevent and respond to the potentially devastating effects of prescription drug abuse.

The NASPER program, first authorized in 2005, authorizes the Secretary to make grants to support these state programs. It also sets standards for privacy and interoperability. H.R. 5710 will reauthorize the program, enhance evaluation and reporting, and make other updates to the program.

These are much-needed pieces of legislation and I look forward to hearing the views of our witnesses here today.