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WHATCOM COUNTY HEALTH BOARD APPROVES NEW SECURE MEDICINE RETURN POLICY

BELLINGHAM, WA – The Whatcom County Council, in their role as the Health Board, voted unanimously on December 5, 2017 to adopt regulation that creates and funds a secure medicine return program for Whatcom County. The new program will make getting rid of leftover or unwanted medicines more convenient by expanding the number of secure locations where people can drop off unused medicines.

The Whatcom County Health Department proposed the regulation at the request of the Whatcom County Health Board as part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent prescription drug abuse and poisonings. Nationally, about 1/3 of medicines sold go unused, and in a 2016 Whatcom County survey, 57% of respondents reported having unused, expired or unwanted medicines in their homes. Unused medication stored in home medicine cabinets provides teens and others with easy access to pharmaceuticals that can be dangerous or deadly if misused. According to the same 2016 survey, nearly one-third of respondents reported experiencing a situation where they or someone they know had medicines taken from their home for use or abuse by someone else.

Additionally, improper disposal of medicines down the drain or in the household trash adds to pharmaceutical pollution in the environment, including in Puget Sound and our drinking water sources. Septic and wastewater systems do not treat water for the presence of pharmaceuticals.

“This new county-wide secure medicine return system is a public health win that will help keep potentially dangerous medicines and out of our local waters and out of homes where they can be intentionally and unintentionally misused and abused,” says Regina Delahunt, Director of the Whatcom County Health Department. “It’s an important piece of the puzzle in preventing opioid addiction, and we are pleased to be able to expand this option so that it’s more readily available to everyone in Whatcom County, not just in certain locations.”

The regulation is modeled after secure medicine return regulations enacted in King, Snohomish, Kitsap and Pierce counties. It requires pharmaceutical producers to provide and finance the secure medicine return system. The system is coordinated by a stewardship organization, which provides drop-off kiosks at approved locations and disposes of returned medicines in a secure and environmentally-sound way. The Whatcom County Health Department is responsible to oversee and monitor the program, which is expected to begin operations in late 2018.

More information about secure medicine return is available at <http://whatcomcounty.us/2652/Secure-Medicine-Return>.

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