

The theory of the problem: A recent Geisinger Center for Health Research study showed that one in four respondents has unused prescription medications in their home. These drugs can be abused or taken accidentally, leading to poisonings, addiction, and death. For instance, 91 people die each day in the U.S. from prescription opioid overdoses, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The Center for Pharmacy Innovation and Outcomes shows that 80 percent of heroin users began by abusing prescription drugs. To avoid this from happening, people may throw away or flush the drugs, which can cause water pollution and harm the environment. For instance, Skip Wieder of the Susquehanna River Heartland Coalition for Environmental Studies (the Coalition), said that traces of medication in the Susquehanna River are leading to smallmouth bass developing both male and female reproductive features. Many communities hold prescription drug takeback days, but those occur only one to a few times per year and are not always located in a convenient location for people. An easier way is needed to both reduce the number of people abusing leftover drugs and those improperly disposing of them.

The theory of change: To keep prescription drugs from contaminating our waterways and out of the hands of those who would abuse them, an easy, quick, and safe way to dispose of these leftover drugs is needed. Ideally it would be a solution that can be tied to other household errands someone has to make on a regular basis, and one that does not cost the takeback organization a considerable sum of funds to implement and execute. The Coalition began working with Geisinger Health System in 2015 to put drug take-back boxes in drugstores and supermarkets throughout central and northeastern Pennsylvania to get more people to safely remove leftover drugs from their home. More than 4,380 pounds of medication have been collected so far through the pilot program. RiverStewards and the Social Enterprise Institute @ Elizabethtown College (SEI) will make connections for the Coalition to get the boxes in more locations, including on college campuses.

The theory of action: The Coalition will work with new and existing partners to identify additional locations where the prescription drug take-back boxes could be located. The boxes need to be in a place that can be locked at night and have the involvement of local law enforcement or military to periodically empty the boxes and incinerate the drugs. On college campuses this may be the public safety office or health clinic. The goal will mirror that of Geisinger's effort, that of getting a take-back box within a 10-minute drive of all urban areas within the Susquehanna River watershed in PA. By doing so, the number of overdoses and accidental poisonings will be reduced, as will the amount of prescription drug residues ending up in the river and its tributaries.

Budget and timeline to be determine.