

National Rx Drug Abuse Summit To Provide New Ideas in Fighting Drug Abuse

NOPE Task Force asked the summit's president and CEO to explain why we should all consider going to the conference on April 6-9 in Atlanta, where thought leaders will discuss using evidence-based and grassroots implementation data in fighting back against the spread of drug abuse.

One of the nation's most important drug abuse summits is just weeks away. NOPE Task Force is a proud supporter of the 4th Annual National Rx Drug Abuse Summit on April 6-9 in Atlanta.

We recently had a chance to ask the summit's president and CEO Nancy Hale a few questions about why we should all consider going to the conference and why we should never let our guard down in our fight against prescription drugs abuse.

NOPE Task Force: Why is it important for drug prevention advocates to attend the summit?

Nancy Hale: There are many terrific initiatives being implemented across the United States, some at the local and regional levels, others at state and national levels. The primary reason for stakeholders to attend the fourth annual National Rx Drug Abuse Summit is to obtain timely and relevant data for their particular fields. We have pulled together more than 180 thought leaders from across the country to lead discussions using evidence-based and grassroots implementation data.

In addition, advocates will get to hear what the top agencies engaged in drug prevention are doing, plan to do in the future, and how we can facilitate changes. Among those who will share their views are Health and Human Services Secretary **Sylvia Burwell**, ONDCP Director **Michael Botticelli**, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director **Dr. Tom Frieden**, National Institutes of Health Director **Dr. Francis Collins**, National Institute on Drug Abuse Director **Dr. Nora Volkow**, former U.S. Representative **Hon. Patrick J. Kennedy** (RI-1st), **Hon. Harold "Hal" Rogers** (KY-5th), Chair of the U.S. House Appropriations Committee and Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Prescription Drug Abuse. There will also be a panel featuring Members of Congress who are driving legislative solutions.

The Rx Summit features:

- A core program of 48 breakout sessions organized into eight educational tracks: Clinical, Education & Advocacy, Law Enforcement, Pharmacy, Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs), Third-Party Payers, Treatment and Trending Topics.
- Three Pre-Summit Workshops focusing on specific issues – including Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, efforts by the nation's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA)

programs, and a primer of the Rx drug overdose epidemic from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- 14 Vision Sessions examining innovative programs and strategies designed to educate, mitigate and resolve issues.
- Thought-Leader Roundtable discussions designed to go in-depth on challenges impacting Rx drug abuse. These sessions are designed around peer learning and actively encourage participation from each attendee.
- Advocates focused on the surging marijuana debate will have the opportunity to attend an all-day program provided in partnership with the organization Smart Approaches to Marijuana (SAM). The Marijuana Education Summit will feature a keynote presentation by Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, director of the ONDCP during the Clinton Administration.

NOPE: What do you hope they will gain by attending?

Nancy Hale: The Rx Summit is the largest national collaboration of professionals seeking to address Rx drug misuse and diversion. Thanks to the Rx Summit's 19-member National Advisory Board – representing the spectrum of prevention, education, treatment and law enforcement efforts – attendees from local, state and federal agencies, business, academia, clinicians, treatment providers, counselors, educators, state and national leaders, and advocates impacted by Rx drug abuse will be empowered with the latest data and best-practice information. Attendees will have opportunities to network with some of the most respected leaders in the country.

NOPE: There's been some reports out lately that suggested the worst of the prescription drug epidemic is finally behind us or soon will be. That's a good thing, if that's indeed the case. How should we in the drug prevention community respond to this news?

Nancy Hale: While recent studies have shown a slight decline in the rate of Rx drug abuse and diversion, we should not let our guard down just as we are realizing some progress. Abuse of Rx drugs is still at unacceptably high levels, and the result has been a corresponding unacceptable rate of drug overdoses. Yes, we are making progress, but it has taken more than a decade to achieve this success. The prescription drug epidemic is not “finally behind us” nor do we believe that it “soon will be.” This issue must be addressed with long-term goals measured by short-term successes. Now is the time to double-down on our efforts – since we are apparently doing something right – by focusing more resources to proven programs, research and regulatory processes.

The drug prevention community should also be aware that while we may experience periodic validation of our efforts, there are unintended consequences – such as the increasing use of heroin and a growing attitude in this country that marijuana, a gateway drug, should be legalized for either medical or recreational use. And, any loss of momentum in our drug prevention efforts will set us back many years.

NOPE: Is this going to be a topic that will be discussed at the summit?

Nancy Hale: Many aspects of this topic will be discussed across the Rx Summit agenda.

NOPE: Is there a central theme to the summit this year? If so, what is it and how was it chosen?

Nancy Hale: No, the central theme is addressing Rx drug abuse, misuse and diversion. There are so many aspects to this problem and they all must work together in a synergistic manner. Science has shown that drug addiction is a disease. Our country's National Drug Control Strategy is based upon the philosophy that to be successful there must be "a balance of evidence-based public health and safety initiatives focusing on key areas such as substance abuse prevention, treatment and recovery."

We are battling a stubborn and strong enemy. At times we will face seemingly insurmountable odds. But, we cannot give up. We must remain strong, pull together our resources, and meet the enemy with force. To quote Professor Albus Dumbledore from Harry Potter: "It is important to fight, and fight again, and keep fighting, for only then can evil be kept at bay."

Learn more – and register – for the 4th Annual National Rx Drug Abuse Summit [here](#).