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BlueCross Launches Campaign To Combat Opioid Abuse

BlueCross Health Foundation Awards Grant to Count It! Lock It! Drop It!™

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. – **Count, Lock and Drop your pills! That's the message from the BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee Health Foundation, which is teaming up with the state Department of Health and the Coffee County Anti-Drug Coalition to reduce prescription pain medication abuse in Tennessee.**

To help address the state's opioid epidemic, the BlueCross Health Foundation is providing a \$1.3 million grant to expand the Coffee County Anti-Drug Coalition's [Count It! Lock It! Drop It!](#)™ program to counties with high rates of opioid deaths. The funding will support training and outreach efforts including a public education advertising campaign.

According to Dr. David Reagan, chief medical officer for the Tennessee Department of Health, opioid abuse is one of Tennessee's most concerning public health issues. "It will take various parties and a multifaceted approach to tackle this crisis, and we're pleased to have the state's largest insurer commit itself to this cause," Reagan said.

In 2015, BlueCross covered more than 1 million opioid prescriptions for its members – that's more than 66.6 million painkillers dispensed. "We know pain medication is necessary to treat many conditions; but there is a clear need to engage in clinical and social efforts across the state to prevent the many tragedies that individuals, families and entire communities have faced from opioid abuse and addiction," explained Dr. Andrea Willis, chief medical officer for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee.

Count It! Lock It! Drop It! was co-founded in 2011 by Christina Merino and Kristina Clark of the Coffee County Anti-Drug Coalition. The goal was to build a comprehensive, community-level approach to prescription drug misuse. The program ensures patients are receiving the same messaging at doctors' offices and pharmacies, as well as integrating counseling on the addictive nature of certain medications and teaching drug safety skills.

The Count It! Lock It! Drop It! program encourages community members to:

- **Count It!** Count pills once every two weeks to monitor theft and help ensure medications are taken properly.
- **Lock It!** Lock and store them in a secure place where others would not think to look.
- **Drop It!** Take unused or expired medications to drop boxes located in participating law enforcement offices or pharmacies or during take-back events.

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“Many adults and teens do not understand the dangers of misusing prescription drugs, and think of them as safe because they are prescribed by a doctor,” said Christina Merino, co-founder of Count It! Lock It! Drop It! “Our program educates everyone from health care providers to grandparents on the need to use, store and dispose of prescription medications safely.”

BlueCross Community Relations and Foundations Director Dawn Abel pointed to research that shows 55 percent of those who abuse painkillers in Tennessee get them from a friend or relative who has a prescription. “Count It! Lock It! Drop It! has a proven track record of educating communities on the importance of safeguarding and properly disposing of prescriptions,” Abel said.

Last year, the Count It! Lock It! Drop It! program in Coffee County collected approximately 600 pounds of various medications at its three drop boxes in the Coffee County Sheriff’s Office, the Manchester Police Department and the Tullahoma Police Department. The estimated street value of the collected opioids was more than \$11,387.

Count It! Lock It! Drop It! is currently operating in 32 counties statewide – 11 in East Tennessee, 18 in Middle Tennessee and three in West Tennessee – with its educational and grassroots program. A main element of the program is permanent drop boxes located in law enforcement offices. By September, all 95 Tennessee counties will have a box in place. For more information on Count It! Lock It! Drop It! or to locate a drop box, visit www.countitlockitdropit.org.

About BlueCross®

BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee’s mission is to provide peace of mind through better health. Founded in 1945, the Chattanooga-based company serves more than 3.4 million members in Tennessee and across the country. BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, Inc., is an independent licensee of the BlueCross BlueShield Association (BCBSA). BCBSA is an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans. For more information, visit the company’s website at bcbst.com.

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