Project STOP
A Pharmacy Guild initiative

Project STOP maintains convenient access to effective cold and flu medicine for legitimate consumers, while restricting access for criminals who would use them to manufacture dangerous illicit drugs.

The Pharmacy Guild of Australia, a not-for-profit organisation and the peak body representing Australian pharmacy owners, has developed an innovative web-based tool to stop criminals from obtaining the pseudoephedrine-based cold and flu medicines used to manufacture dangerous illicit drugs. This tool is called Project STOP.

'Pseudo runners' travel from pharmacy to pharmacy and attempt to purchase as many pseudoephedrine-based medicines as possible. They then use these medicines to manufacture methamphetamines, known as 'speed' and 'ice'.

Australia's network of approximately 5500 pharmacies services a population of more than 24 million people, with pharmacies distributed across all eight States and Territories. Each of these has its own individual law enforcement agencies and health regulatory bodies, with minimal communication between them. In the past, pseudo runners have successfully exploited this communication breakdown.

Project STOP provides a real-time database for recording all requests for products containing pseudoephedrine. The program provides decision support to pharmacists – "Should I or shouldn't I supply to this person" – while also supplying real time data to law enforcement agencies and health regulators. This data is provided regardless of where the criminals are trying to operate in the country. All activity for the nation can be accessed from the one screen.

How Project STOP works

All requests for pseudoephedrine-based products are entered into a web-based database. The pharmacist requests photo ID or other proof of identity and is instantly able to verify if a purchase has already been made against that ID and, armed with this information, accepts or declines the sale. Along with these ID details the product requested is also entered into the database.

If the same ID is presented more than a certain number of times within a certain number of days, the system will automatically send a text message to the cell phone of the appropriate police officer advising of the ID number and the stores in which it has been presented.

At the same time, data is made available to law enforcement agencies through a secure website, including activity by ID, drug type, pharmacy or specific geographic area. The locations of all pharmacies are geo-coded and the movements of potential pseudo runners are automatically mapped.

Project STOP was successfully trialled in Queensland and is now in operation in every State and Territory. The national roll-out of Project STOP was funded by the Australian Government through the Attorney General's Department, as part of its National Strategy to Prevent the Diversion of Precursor Chemicals into Illicit Drug Manufacture.

This system works. It has already helped achieve numerous arrests and clandestine lab detections. Project STOP spells disaster for pseudo runners, while ensuring reasonable and convenient access to these safe and effective pseudoephedrine-based medications for the legitimate consumer.

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We are community pharmacy