

# Helping Clients Manage Their Unused MEDICATION



Orleans Essex VNA & Hospice offers medication destruction options **free to all clients**. Patients and their families are often under stress, and managing unused and expired medications on top of everything else can be challenging. You can help your clients destroy their unused and expired medications by following the simple steps outlined below.

- 1- Let each of your clients know about the availability of free medication disposal assistance
- 2- If they are interested, review the types and quantities of unused/excess medications they have and determine how many envelopes they need
- 3- Obtain the envelope(s) from Orleans Essex VNA & Hospice and bring to your next visit
- 4- Assist your client with completing the process

Only the client can destroy the medications, but Orleans Essex VNA & Hospice staff members can assist with opening medication containers, holding the envelope open as the client places the medication into it, sealing the envelope, and other indirect assistance.

## Mail-Back Envelopes

Medications do not have to be removed from their containers, as long as the containers easily fit in the envelope. The client should:



- 1- Put the medications in the envelope
  - Up to 8 ounces (of which no more than 4 ounces is liquids)
  - Put containers with liquids in a sealed plastic bag first
  - Do not include any sharps (needles) or inhalers!
- 2- Seal the envelope and ensure it enters the U.S. Postal Service mail system

The unmarked pre-paid envelopes are pre-addressed and sent to an incinerator for destruction. The envelopes are tracked, and verification of destruction is available.





## Why Can't Clients Throw Them in the Trash or Flush Them Down the Drain?

When people clean out their medicine cabinet, they often throw the unused medications down the drain or toilet or into the trash, where they can enter the environment. Medications that are thrown in the trash can be retrieved and misused. Trash that is generated in Vermont ends up at a landfill, where the medications can be released to the environment.

Flushing unused medications pollutes water supplies. Many homes have septic systems, and any medications that are flushed can pollute the groundwater. If the home is on a sewer system, the treatment plant does not remove medications, and they are discharged to receiving waters where they can harm people and wildlife.

Keeping pharmaceuticals out of septic systems, landfills, and wastewater treatment systems is the most effective way to prevent pollution from this source.

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## Why Focus on Medication Disposal?

When there isn't an easy way to properly manage unused medications, people tend to accumulate them at home. **Excess medications can create confusion and could lead to taking the wrong medication or dosage.** This can affect your client's health or that of their family.

If they have opioids or other controlled substances, removing them from their home can **prevent substance abuse.** Often people, who misuse prescription medications, get them from a friend or relative, often without their knowledge, straight from their medicine cabinet. Ensuring that unused medications do not get into the wrong hands is critical.



Orleans / Essex

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