

Testimony
of AARP in The Virgin Islands
for the Committee on Health, Hospitals & Human Services
of the
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
“Prescription Drug Monitoring Program”
November 22, 2024
Given by Troy de Chabert - Schuster, State Director

Honorable Senator Ray Fonseca, Chair of the Committee on Health, Hospitals, & Human Services, and Senators of the 35th Legislature. AARP in The Virgin Islands appreciates the opportunity to provide comments in support of Bill No 35-0295, which seeks to establish a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) in this territory. As the prevalence of prescription drug abuse continues to rise nationwide – it is an issue that exposes the most vulnerable amongst us to life-threatening health outcomes.

As an organization dedicated to empowering individuals as they age, AARP Virgin Islands urges your committee to advocate for enhanced protections for the health and safety of all Virgin Islanders, particularly our seniors managing chronic illnesses, by passing this critical legislation.

Why This Legislation Is Critical

Prescription drug misuse, particularly involving opioids, is a growing public health crisis. *In 2023*, the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics reported that more than 16 million Americans abused prescription drugs – an alarming number that underscores the urgency of this growing crisis. Even more shocking, is that a sizable percentage of those affected were adults aged 50 and older, due to complex medication regimens and chronic illnesses. This trend is projected to worsen, as the population of older adults is projected to increase by 47% by 2050.

The Virgin Islands faces similar risks. Without intervention, like a PDMP, practices such as “doctor shopping”, using multiple pharmacies, and borrowing – even stealing medications will continue to harm individuals and further strain an already fragile healthcare system. A PDMP, is a proven public health initiative that aligns with AARP’s commitment to fostering the well-being of all Americans. Evidence from other states and territories – including Puerto Rico and Guam – demonstrates its effectiveness. For example, Puerto Rico’s implementation of the PDMP has resulted in measurable reduction in prescription misuse, better prescribing and preventative programs.

Specifically, a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) in the Virgin Islands will:

- **Track prescriptions** to prevent misuse and overprescribing in a real-time, integrated primary care setting,
- **Connect patients, prescribers, and pharmacists** for safer, more coordinated effort of care to help evaluate patients use, treatment and dispensing decisions, and,
- **Provide for the collection of critical data** to track trends, dispensing history and preventative measures – available to authorized healthcare professionals, law enforcement agents and regulatory agency’ GVI’s Department of Health

Bill Recommendations

While we strongly support the passage of the Bill, its success requires additional measures:

1. **Adequate Funding:** AARP urges you to include this initiative in the GVI’s Fiscal Year 2026 budget. GVI’s Department of Health must receive sufficient funding to implement and sustain the program, including infrastructure, staffing and training.
2. **Clear Implementation Timeline:** AARP recommends the program be operational within 18 months of the Act’s enactment to ensure prompt action and accountability.
3. **Public Awareness Campaign:** A comprehensive plan to educate the public on the benefits of the PDMP, proper prescription use, and patient safety must accompany the Act’s implementation.

4. **Stakeholders Collaboration:** Engage healthcare providers – especially prescribers, pharmacists, and community leaders to ensure successful implementation.

A Call to Action

The passage of **Bill No 35-0295** represents an initiative-taking, evidence-based solution that have transformed health care delivery across the nation. By voting **YES** on this legislation and supporting its funding, timely implementation, public awareness, you are committing to an essential investment in the health and stability of all Virgin Islanders.

Conclusion

Thank you again, Chairman Fonseca, and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to share our comments with you about the impact and benefits of a Prescription Drug Monitoring Program in averting a public health crisis in our territory. The establishment of the Virgin Islands' PDMP will serve as a robust tool to support the clinical decisions of our residents ensuring their well-being and ability to continue to live a life of dignity and respect.

The successful presentation of this initiative would not have been possible without the involvement of stakeholders throughout the years. The collaborative nature that led to the acknowledgement of importance of this initiative, included the involvement of the Virgin Islands Healthcare Fraud Task Force- which we serve as a member, the regional DEA and FBI offices, and the Bill sponsor Senator Donna Frett-Gregory. I stand ready to answer any questions.