

Mitigating
HIRING RISK
*in community
pharmacies*

By Kasey Stuart



Community pharmacies large and small face specific challenges when it comes to building a robust and thorough background screening program. The qualifications for each job title vary more than most. While there is no one-size-fits-all option that truly makes sense for an industry with such varied needs, the cost of not making the effort to mitigate hiring risk through background screening can be astronomical, especially for pharmacies that don't have the protection of being part of a national chain.

Many companies assume that creating a background screening program is a difficult process, so it's perhaps understandable (if imprudent) that some steps in the process fall through the cracks. Some stores have even neglected to run background checks altogether on

employees who don't seem to have high-risk positions. This is a dangerous and sometimes very costly misconception. Craig Kessler, president and CEO of backgroundchecks.com says, "We cannot overstate the importance of running background checks on every employee that steps inside of a pharmacy. The public is intrinsically involved in this industry, meaning that a dangerous hire poses a risk to every single customer that visits the location."

DRUG CRIME RISK ON RISE

Perhaps the most obvious difference in the pharmacy environment as a whole is the unique risk of drug-related crimes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that prescription drug abuse, specifically opioids, costs the United States a staggering \$78.5 billion per year.





A position stocking shelves at a local pharmacy could be a convenient opportunity to divert controlled substances, and the supply is essentially limitless. If a hire is involved in organized crime, even on a small scale, a delivery of scheduled drugs in large amounts to the pharmacy is a “business” opportunity. By performing a thorough background screen at all levels of hiring, pharmacies can pinpoint applicants with histories of theft and drug abuse, proactively stopping a theft issue before it begins.

Some positions within community pharmacies are, necessarily, highly regulated. No pharmacist handling prescription medications is likely to be hired without a thorough background check; however, pharmacists are not the only employees with access to the public or potentially dangerous medications. Many pharmacies have incorporated delivery services, meaning that employees personally deliver sensitive materials to the home addresses of customers. Imagine discovering that the person delivering your child’s medications was in fact a registered sex offender whose crimes involved children, hired because the pharmacy did not run a proper background check, perhaps assuming that since it knew the person (or thought it knew), that it could trust them. Unfortunately, this is not a fictional scenario, but a real-life example of one backgroundchecks.com employee’s interaction with a pharmacy’s delivery service.

VENDOR AND CONTRACTOR SCREENING CRITICAL

Another overlooked risk is vendor and contractor screening. Maybe you know that your employees have all been thoroughly vetted. Can you say the same about

third-party employees, such as janitorial services or a courier service, which have a daily impact on the pharmaceutical world? Due diligence prior to signing a service contract should include knowing how the contractor’s employees have been screened. Many background-screening companies, including backgroundchecks.com, have vendor-screening programs that can assist with this aspect specifically.

The bottom line is that pharmacies of all sizes and scopes absolutely need to be screening their employees, regardless of the position they may hold. While this means taking the time to create different levels of screening for different positions, the benefits far outweigh the potentially minimal initial investment. These screening levels help employers follow industry best practices, allowing for “lower risk employees,” such as stockers and clerks, to be screened for only the most relevant elements such as criminal history and employment verifications. Pharmacy technicians should be screened for additional items such as falsified credentials and education history.

“Many employers are under the impression that background screening has to be complicated, especially on the level that pharmacies need to screen. But it doesn’t have to be,” Kessler says. “A bad hire costs a company so much more than a background check ever will.” ■

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