



Regulation of Dietary Supplements Sold for Weight Loss and Muscle Building: What States Can Do

REQUEST: STRIPED, MEDA, and NEDA urge U.S. state leaders to protect young people from the dangers of dietary supplements sold for weight loss and muscle building by banning the sale of these products to minors under the age of 18 years and moving these products from open shelves to behind the counter, requiring consumers to request them directly from a pharmacist, manager, or other store supervisory personnel.

THE PROBLEM

- **Our youth are at risk!** Supplements for weight loss and muscle building are linked with eating disorders as well as body dysmorphic disorder. More than 30 percent of children and adolescents take dietary supplements on a regular basis, and 11% of teens report ever using dietary supplements for weight loss. An estimated 14 million Americans suffer from eating disorders.
- **Dangerous products.** Dietary supplements sold for weight loss and muscle building are associated with serious health risks and side effects. These risks include organ failure, testicular cancer, heart attack, stroke, and even death. Some supplements are adulterated with illegal substances such as steroids, prescription pharmaceuticals, and heavy metals.
- **Insufficient regulation by the FDA.** Supplements are taken off shelves by the FDA only *after* reports of serious injury or death. The attorneys general of 14 states joined together in a letter to the U.S. Congress seeking a federal investigation into the dietary supplements industry. But young people need greater protection now.

STEPS STATES CAN TAKE TO PROTECT ITS YOUTH

- 1) PROHIBIT SALE TO MINORS.** State legislatures can prohibit the sale of dietary supplements sold for weight loss and muscle building to minors under the age of 18 years. Due to their developmental stage, youth may be unable to weigh the harms linked with these products.
- 2) MOVE PRODUCTS BEHIND THE COUNTER.** Moving supplements for weight loss and muscle building from the shelves to behind the counter will ensure that consumers will first speak with a pharmacist, manager, or other store supervisory personnel.
- 3) URGE THE ATTORNEY GENERAL.** State legislatures can urge their attorney general to enforce consumer protection statutes that prohibit unfair or deceptive sale of dietary supplements.
- 4) EDUCATE CONSUMERS.** State departments of public health can educate consumers about the health risks associated with dietary supplements for weight loss and muscle building.

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

Boston Children's Hospital
Division of Adolescent/Young Adult Medicine
300 Longwood Avenue, LO306
Boston, MA 02115
617-355-4191
www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped

Multi-Service Eating Disorders Association

288 Walnut Street, Suite 130
Newton, MA 02460
617-558-1881
www.medainc.org

National Eating Disorder Association

165 West 46th Street, Suite 402
New York, NY 10036
212-575-6200
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

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