

March 29, 2017

An Open Letter to Congress in Support of Legislation to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs

Dear Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned organizations representing millions of consumer and grassroots advocates, public health experts, healthcare providers and clinical researchers across the country, applaud bicameral introduction of The Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs Act. During a time when the majority of Americans think that lowering the cost of prescription drugs should be a top healthcare priority for Congress and the Trump administration, this Act meets that demand.ⁱ It provides a responsible approach to increasing the public's access to affordable medicines while saving taxpayer dollars.

It is morally wrong that in the richest country in the world, people are denied access to the medicines they need because they cannot afford them, as is the case for millions of Americans today. Americans support, by wide margins and across party lines, strong action to reduce medicine prices and end the monopoly abuses of prescription drug corporations.ⁱⁱ Taxpayer dollars drive medical innovation, and taxpayers deserve more in return for their support. Instead, Americans continue to pay the highest prices in the world for pharmaceuticals, or as is often the case, go without treatment because the medicine they need is unaffordable. Nearly 17 percent of American adults aged 55 and older report skipping doses or not filling a prescription within the last 12 months because of cost.ⁱⁱⁱ This is unacceptable.

The Act, introduced by Senators Al Franken (D-MN), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Jack Reed (D-RI), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Maggie Hassan (D-NH), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Jeff Merkley (OR), Tom Udall (D-NM) Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Cory Booker (D-NJ) in the Senate, and Representatives Janice Schakowsky (D-IL-9), Elijah Cummings (D-MD-7), Peter Welch (D-VT-0), and Rosa DeLauro (D-CT-3) in the House of Representatives, includes a wide-ranging approach to tackle prescription drug prices. In summary, it would -

- End the monopoly abuses of prescription drug corporations that keep prices high.
- Accelerate cost-lowering generic competition.
- Stop companies from gouging consumers with steep price increases.
- Allow Medicare to negotiate fair drug prices and lower out-of-pocket costs for seniors.
- Remove tax deductions for TV and Internet ads that promote drugs to consumers.
- Cap out-of-pocket medicine costs in health insurance plans.
- Require transparency from the drug industry.

This Act is a significant step toward addressing one of the leading drivers of healthcare costs for the federal government and patients – prescription drug prices.^{iv} It does not include every remedy, but it provides a common-sense approach to tackle the urgent problem of people lacking access to the medicines they need to lead healthy and productive lives. Congress cannot afford to sit idly by while price gouging continues. We urge you to pass The Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs Act without delay.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Retired Americans
The American Medical Student Association (AMSA)
AFSCME
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Doctors for America
Housing Works
MoveOn
National Committee to Preserve Social Security & Medicare
National Physicians Alliance
Other98
PFAM: People of Faith for Access to Medicines
Public Citizen
Social Security Works
Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM)

ⁱ Ashley Kirzinger, Bryan Wu, et al. Kaiser Health Tracking Poll: Health Care Priorities for 2017. *The Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation*. Jan. 2017. Available at: <http://kff.org/health-costs/poll-finding/kaiser-health-tracking-poll-health-care-priorities-for-2017/>

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Morgan SG, Lee A, Barnieh L, et al. Cost-related non-adherence to prescribed medicines among older adults: a cross-sectional analysis of a survey in 11 developed countries. *BMJ Open*. 2017;7(1):e014287. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5293866/>

^{iv} Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Prescription Drugs: Innovation, Spending, and Patient Access. Dec. 2016. Available at: <http://delauero.house.gov/sites/delauero.house.gov/files/Prescription-Drugs-Innovation-Spending-and-Patient-Access-12-07-16.pdf>