

Less for Rx Affects Us All

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Sen. Smith writes about legislative efforts to lower the cost of prescription drugs and improve access to affordable, high-quality health care for Wisconsinites.

MADISON - Nobody should have to choose between paying for groceries or lifesaving drugs. Many people even ration their drug to save money and end up putting themselves at greater risk. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 37% of individuals taking four or more medications per day could not afford their prescriptions.

In 2019, Governor Evers signed Executive Order #39 to form the Task Force on Reducing Prescription Drug Prices.



The cost of insulin had risen from \$40 a vial in 2001 to \$289 in 2018. Medications to manage asthma increased as much as 50% over just a few years. Cancer treatments, arthritis medication and other lifesaving prescriptions also saw massive price increases. With the

knowledge that prescription drugs were estimated to cost Wisconsin residents over \$1.3 billion in 2019, the Executive Order required the following:

“The Task Force shall advise and assist the Governor in addressing excessive prescription drug prices and the financial burden that prescription drug prices place on Wisconsin residents.” The Task Force was responsible to:

- a. Gather and analyze data and information relating to the development, pricing, distribution, and purchasing of prescription drugs.
- b. Review actions already to reduce prescription drug prices.
- c. Identify opportunities to coordinate with other states and the federal government.
- d. Recommend potential actions that can be taken to reduce prescription drug prices in Wisconsin.

Now, I know that I don't need to rehash what you probably already know. Profits for drug manufacturers have gone through the roof which affects all of us either directly or indirectly through the cost of insurance.

The task force met 8 times through August of 2020, and through consensus, made a number of [recommendations](#) that included the following:

1. Require additional transparency and reporting for prescription drug supply chain entities.
2. Increase the number of consumer protection staff and anti-trust attorneys focused on improper pharmaceutical industry practices.
3. Increase funding for free and charitable clinics, dedicating a portion of the funding to pharmacy benefits, to expand access.
4. Limit the copay an insurer can charge for a month's supply of insulin.

5. Ensure that health care providers participating in the 340B drug discount program are able to reinvest savings from drug purchases into patient care and support activities.
6. Advocate for federal regulatory changes to streamline the market entry of affordable generic equivalents.
7. Explore and support efforts to improve physician access to real-time patient pharmacy benefit information in electronic medical records to allow physicians to consider out-of-pocket costs when prescribing medications.



In his budget proposal earlier this year, Governor Evers included measures to begin implementing the recommendations from the Task Force. Unfortunately, pharmaceutical corporations still wield a lot of political power and those measures were cut from the budget by Republicans on the Joint Finance Committee.

Just because a few politicians in positions of power don't want to take on the drug companies and address the rising cost of prescription medication doesn't mean this issue will magically go away. That's why I recently joined a number of colleagues and introduced 16 stand-alone bills that we hope will force our legislature to act. The following are samples of what is in those bills.

- Creating a Prescription Drug Affordability Review Board and Office of Prescription Drug Affordability
- Grants for free and charitable clinics
- A program to import more affordable medications from Canada
- A cap on Insulin co-payments
- Fiduciary and disclosure requirements on pharmacy benefit managers

- Licensure of pharmaceutical representatives
- Insulin safety net programs

You can help move these important bills by contacting your legislators and the committee chairs in each house. It's about time we took common sense measures to protect the health and well-being of everyone.

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