

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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Big Pharma Works to Deflect Criticism as Prescription Drug Prices Debate Heats Up in Congress

Following last week's Senate Finance Committee hearing, when pharmaceutical executives tried to [defend](#) their pricing mechanisms, drug corporations are seeking to defuse criticism and change the debate. Some corporations are making big announcements regarding lower prices on select drugs, and new reporting shows that the industry is subsidizing advocacy groups in hopes of securing their support.

Eli Lilly made headlines this week by cutting the price of a generic insulin drug, Humalog, in half. While this is welcome by many patients who use that drug, most experts called it a [publicity stunt](#) to mitigate the growing outrage toward name-brand drug prices. Furthermore, many insulin-users say that the lowered price is merely a [baby step](#) toward a real solution. Many of those who pay out-of-pocket will still have to ration their supplies in order to cut costs. The generic will cost \$137.35 per vial--in [other countries](#), vials cost around \$30 on average.

In a related development, a Kaiser Health News analysis [discovered](#) that half of patient advocacy groups receive funding from pharmaceutical corporations. The study noted that many advocacy groups are opposed to proposed Medicare changes that would lower health care costs, including a provision requiring patients to try cheaper drugs before being allowed to switch to more expensive options.

"Congress must act to protect patients from corporations that price-gouge our most vulnerable citizens," said Alliance President **Robert Roach, Jr.** "It is clear that corporate executives will not act on their own."

Advocacy Groups Call for Medicaid Expansion in Texas

Two dozen advocacy groups descended on the Texas state capitol this week demanding a state constitutional amendment putting [Medicare expansion on the 2020 ballot](#). Texas is one of only 14 states that has not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Medicaid expansion was on the November 2018 ballot in Idaho, Nebraska, and Utah.

Texas has the highest percentage and number of [uninsured residents](#) in the United States. At least 64% of Texas adults support expansion.

The number of uninsured Texans rose from 4.5 to 4.8 million between 2016 and 2017, and experts believe that Medicaid expansion could provide insurance to more than one million residents. Most uninsured Texans [earn too much](#) to qualify for Medicaid but too little to qualify for tax credits to purchase insurance through the ACA.

“The people of Texas understand that expanding Medicaid means better health care for more people,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Since the Texas legislature has failed to act, we applaud the activists who are fighting to put the decision in the people’s hands.”

The Rural Nursing Home Crisis

Rural nursing homes are [shutting down](#) due to corporate buyouts and bankruptcy, forcing residents to find new places to live far from family or friends. In small communities, home health care aides are often unavailable.

According to the Cowles Research Group, more than 440 nursing homes have [closed](#) or merged over the last ten years, displacing thousands of patients.



“Fewer options for rural seniors who need long term care makes difficult decisions even harder,” said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “Increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for nursing homes would help ensure that all older Americans can find places to live closer to where they resided previously.”

Celebrating International Women’s Day

On this International Women’s Day, the Alliance celebrates women across the United States and around the world. Issues facing women around the world have changed during its 100-year history, from the fight for the right to vote and to work, to access to an education for all girls and women.

The [first Women’s Day](#) was celebrated in 1909 in New York, but it only became an international event in 1975 when recognized by the United Nations. In some communities it is marked with protests and demonstrations; in others, it is a day to celebrate womanhood. 2020 will mark 100 years of white women in the United States having the right to vote.

The Alliance is celebrating International Women's Day by drawing attention to the need to expand Social Security for older women. Among the measures that should be adopted are ensuring that all surviving spouses receive 75% of the total household Social Security benefits they had prior to



their spouse's death. This change is crucial because the [poverty rate for women over 65](#) is twice that of men over 65, and 50% of elderly women in poverty are widows.

"Today we celebrate all women young and old, be they a retiree, a homemaker, an employee, a union member, a student, a business owner or a Member of Congress," said President Roach. "Our society would not be what it is today without the contribution of women, particularly those who have fought for equality at home and abroad."

President Roach concluded, "Equality for women aligns perfectly with the Alliance mission to ensure dignity and security for all Americans."