

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

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As Price of Insulin Goes Through the Roof, Diabetes Patients Form “Caravans” To Canada

Retirees across the country are feeling the weight of astronomical drug prices, especially diabetes patients. Many are going to great lengths to pay for life-saving insulin. While some are dangerously rationing their insulin supplies, the *Washington Post* reports that an increasing number are [traveling in groups](#) to buy the drug in Canada.

In Canada, you can buy insulin without a prescription. The travelers do not think trips to Canada are a permanent fix to high insulin or other drug prices. In addition to maintaining their health, they are hoping to send a message to Congress and the White House that action is required now to lower all prescription drug prices.

Medicare’s price for two insulin glargine drugs used to treat diabetes [increased by more than 17.5% per year](#) from 2012 to 2017. From 2012 to 2016, the average annual price of insulin in the United States nearly doubled from [\\$2,864 to \\$5,705](#) (a 99% increase).

A vial of NovoRapid insulin in Canada costs about \$30 USD, and in the United States that same vial — called NovoLog — costs about \$300.

“They have lower prices [in Canada] because the government has put in regulations to make sure that their citizens are not paying too much. We have not yet made that decision in the U.S.,” said **Lija Greenseid**, an organizer of the caravan.

More than 30 million Americans have diabetes. Only [three manufacturers](#) in the U.S. produce insulin for the 7.5 million diabetes patients who rely on the drug to survive. Health care advocates blame the American health care system for allowing these pharmaceutical giants to have overwhelming control of the market.

“Stories like this remind us of how dire the situation is for so many people,” said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. “No American should be pushed to such extremes to afford their medication, and many people simply aren’t able to travel that far. Our elected officials must begin holding drug corporations accountable so they can no longer gouge patients. We can start by letting Medicare negotiate prices.”

In 2018, nearly [28 million Americans](#) watched the costs of their medications rise over the course of a year, while pharmaceutical companies benefited from huge tax breaks and pulled in record profits.

Alliance, Allies Join Forces to Demand Affordable Drug Prices

The Alliance, along with other organizations including Health Care for America Now, the United Auto Workers, and Public Citizen held an event on Capitol Hill Thursday. They announced a new coordinated effort to demand that Congress lower drug prices and end drug corporations' monopoly on life-saving medications.

Alliance executive board member **Ken Pease** of Fairfax, Virginia spoke about his frustration with the pharmaceutical industry's price-fixing practices, which have forced him to forego a simpler, improved medication recommended by his doctor to treat his thyroid disease. That drug would cost \$430 per month after insurance -- far more than he can afford.



Alliance executive board member Ken Pease speaks at rally on Capitol Hill

"We know pharmaceutical companies will continue to prioritize corporate profits over patient lives until lawmakers take bold action to change the system," he said. "We must take away drug corporations' ability to set prices and keep them high through their monopolies."

Congress has not passed legislation that would address the price-gouging despite increased attention on the issue. The new coalition is looking to fix that.

Meanwhile, protesters, including members of the Indiana Alliance, gathered on Thursday outside the headquarters of Eli Lilly in Indianapolis to demand lower insulin prices. In 2018, Eli Lilly brought in \$9 billion in revenue from diabetes medications.

Thursday hundreds of Alliance members and other concerned citizens called their Congressional representatives and told them to act now to lower drug prices.

"A Harvard University study says [millions of Americans](#) are skipping medication refills to try and save money on drugs they desperately need. We can no longer wait for Congress to act," said **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. "Just look at the cost of the four most popular types of insulin, which have [tripled](#) over the past decade."

Redefining 'Healthy': Many Seniors Rate Health as Excellent Despite Illnesses

Many believe that old age causes seniors to feel miserable or unwell. New research says otherwise.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a survey that found that [82% of adults ages 65-74 describe their overall health as either "excellent," "very good," or "good."](#) Only 18% of this demographic reflected negatively on their health. In the 75-and-older age bracket, 73% held a positive perspective on their health.

Sociologists believe that, despite illness, many older Americans are optimistic about their health because they are content with their lives. “Mental health becomes an even more important component of self-rated health with age,” said **Jason Schnittker**, a professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania.

Seniors agree -- as long as they feel encouraged by their lifestyle, they consider themselves healthy. “My attitude now is, ‘I’ve lived 70 good years, and I hope the next years are rich as well,’” said **Laurie Brock**, a 69-year-old who considers her health “very good” even though she is diagnosed with severe arthritis and systemic lupus erythematosus. “I think most people fear old age. But once they get there, it’s like, ‘Oh, I’m still going, I’m still OK.’ And fear becomes acceptance.”

Not everyone is as positive, however. Nearly [6% of Americans 65 and older](#) are diagnosed with some form of depression, which negatively affects how they view the state of their health. Those living in low-income and marginalized communities were also more likely to report that their health was [poor](#).

“It is encouraging that so many older Americans are reclaiming the word ‘healthy,’” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Promoting active lifestyles and positive mental health in all communities can help put a stop to myths and false stereotypes about aging.”

Rep. Frankel and Sen. Wyden Recognized with Retiree Hero Awards

During the last week, the Florida Alliance and the Oregon Alliance presented Rep. **Lois Frankel** (FL) and Sen. **Ron Wyden** (OR) Retiree Hero Awards for their perfect pro-retiree voting records.



Florida Alliance President Bill Sauers with Rep. Lois Frankel



Oregon Alliance President Everice Moro with Sen. Ron Wyden

Idaho, Connecticut Alliance Chapters Hold Annual Conventions

At the Idaho convention last Tuesday, Alliance members heard speeches and presentations from chapter President **Steve Landon** and Secretary **Tracie Roberts**, as well as a keynote address from Alliance Regional Board Member **Steve Kofahl**.



Idaho's attendees gathered on June 11.



Connecticut Alliance President
Bette Marafino with Rep. Larson

Rep. **John Larson** (CT) spoke to the Connecticut Alliance at their annual convention in Hartford this past Monday about the legislation that he introduced to expand Social Security.

AFL- CIO State President **Sal Luciano** and Alliance Executive Director Fiesta also addressed the attendees.

Mr. Fiesta provided an update on several of the Alliance's legislative priorities, including lowering drug prices, Social Security expansion and pension protection. He also explained how NAFTA 2.0 would lock in high drug prices by limiting generic competition.