

Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin
Testimony
Ways and Means Committee
Member Day Hearing: Member Priorities
June 4, 2019

- Thank you Chairman Neal and Ranking Member Brady for the opportunity to share my Ways and Means priorities.
- My Chairman and Ranking Member, when I was running for Congress, the high cost of prescription drugs was one of the top issues people talked to me about.
- That hasn't changed. Today when I'm home in my district, people frequently stop me at the grocery store and on the street to tell me how crippling the cost of prescription drugs is for them.
- And my caseworkers hear the stories every day. Like the story of my constituent Connie, who lives in Brighton, Michigan, and has to spend \$10,000 every year on Humira for her Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis - even though she's on Medicare.
- Or Joanna, who lives in my hometown of Holly, Michigan. Joanna was once hospitalized for several days due to complications because she couldn't afford her inhaler. Her complex health needs require a number of medicines, so she rations her medications in order to keep her costs manageable - and still spends hundreds of dollars each month on prescriptions.
- This is just wrong. No one should have to choose between paying for their prescriptions or putting food on the table.
- And it doesn't have to be this way. Congress has the power -- right now -- to significantly lower how much people like Connie and Joanna

are paying.

- In fact, sky-high drug prices are a problem that *both* Democrats and Republicans agree we need to solve -- making this issue a real area of common ground. We have an opportunity, this year, to pass legislation that will have an immediate effect on families' pocketbooks and health. It's time for us to build on the common ground we have and get it done.
- We can start by looking at ways to ensure that competition -- and transparency -- are built into our health care system.
- There is no reason, for example, why Medicare should be barred from negotiating for lower drug prices, something the Veterans Administration does already.
- And there is no reason why patients should be in the dark when it comes to the out-of-pocket costs of life saving drugs.
- In fact, patients often pay too much for the medicine they need - because they don't know that other, comparable medications or generics are available for a lower price, or that the same drug is available at a lower price at a different pharmacy.
- I'll give you an example of this issue from my district. My constituent, Griffin, from Howell, Michigan uses an inhaler. Griffin tracks insurance and budgeting very carefully, so his wife, Nichole, knew something was wrong when she went to pick up his prescribed inhaler at the pharmacy and was charged double what she was expecting.
- As it turns out, a new generic version of his inhaler had just been released. Because the generic had a lower over-the-counter price, the pharmacy's computer system had automatically changed any prescriptions for the brand-name inhaler to the generic. However,

because of how Griffin's insurance plan covered the drug, the generic actually cost him more.

- The prescribing doctor and pharmacist didn't even know about this change - the computer system made it automatically. This was not something that the prescribing doctor or pharmacist even knew about — the computer system made the change automatically. It took the pharmacist a while to figure out how to override the computer system and get Griffin the cheaper brand-name drug back. Now, every ~~Every~~ month, Nichole and Griffin have to go through the same override process to get the cheaper inhaler.
- In addition to being left in the dark about the availability of cheaper yet effective alternatives, patients are often unaware that drug prices can vary wildly between pharmacies. Constituents tell me about medications that can easily cost *five times* the price at one pharmacy versus another. The more expensive pharmacy certainly isn't going to disclose that, and doctors are often unaware of which pharmacies offer better prices.
- It should not be up to individual patients waiting in line at the pharmacy for life-saving medications to push medical providers to research the cost of those medications. Americans are entitled to know up-front the cost of the drugs they're being prescribed and whether there is a more affordable alternative that would work just as well, or that would be cheaper at a different pharmacy.
- Transparency and efficiency that puts patients' needs first are values we can all agree on. There is no reason not to move forward with straightforward yet critical changes to our system such as these.
- I urge the committee to embark on the serious and urgent work of bringing down drug prices. The health, well-being and very lives of the people we represent depend on it.

