



UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE
FOUNDATION OF CONNECTICUT

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PRESS RELEASE

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Statewide Poll Shows Residents Worried About High Drug Costs – Support Strong Government Action Across Party Lines

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut released the results of a poll that shows state residents' concerns about prescription drug affordability and bipartisan support for government action. The poll was conducted by Altarum's Healthcare Value Hub in early February. Over 900 Connecticut adults responded.

A data brief summarizing the poll's results, prepared by the Healthcare Value Hub, was distributed at a press conference on Thursday. It shows that Connecticut residents are worried they won't be able to afford the prescription drugs they need to stay healthy. It also reports strong support across party lines for a range of government actions to curb rising prescription drug prices.

“The poll shows very clearly that Connecticut residents want action, regardless of their political affiliation. They should not have to choose between taking their medications as prescribed and putting food on the table,” said Frances Padilla, President, Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut.

Lynn Quincy, Director of the Healthcare Value Hub, noted that the poll results, “are strongly aligned with other national polls showing grave consumer worry about healthcare affordability with particular concerns about drug costs.”

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Key Findings of the Poll

- 88% of people who take their prescriptions regularly are worried they won't be able to afford their medications.
- Close to two thirds of people who buy insurance on their own are somewhat or very worried they won't be able to afford the prescription drugs they need.
- 20% of people report cutting pills in half, skipping doses and/or not filling a prescription due to cost.

Poll respondents showed strong support for a variety of suggested strategies for addressing high prescription drug costs.

- 94% support authorizing the Attorney General to take legal action to prevent price gouging
- 93% support improving price transparency like requiring pharmaceutical manufacturers to provide advanced notice and justification of price increases
- 89% support setting prices for drugs to make them affordable

The poll showed that these opinions were very similar across party lines.

Remarks from the Press Conference

Greta Stifel, from Berlin, CT, spoke at the press conference about the challenges she faces as a person living with a rare form of cancer, "I should be using all my energy to fight my cancer, not worrying about how to afford the medications that keep me alive."

Laura Hoch, Manager of Advocacy, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, spoke about the rising medication prices individuals living with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) face. "The National MS Society and its constituents are deeply concerned by the fact that access to many medications has become so cost-prohibitive. We must act to ensure that those living with MS and other chronic illnesses are able to afford life-saving prescription drugs in a transparent process."

Ross Kristal, MD, Yale Primary Care Residency Program and Copello Fellow, National Physicians Alliance, said, "I've seen firsthand the consequences of unfair prescription drug pricing." He spoke about a patient he treated recently who has Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD): "Her breathing was so bad that at one point she had to be treated in the intensive care unit." When she was discharged from the hospital, a good plan was in place that included the use of several inhaler medications. "Days later she was admitted again to the hospital for the same reason because she could not afford to purchase the inhalers. People in this state should not have to pay inordinate amounts of money to simply breathe," said Dr. Kristal.

Speaking on behalf of Connecticut physicians, Matthew Katz, Executive Vice President, Connecticut State Medical Society, referring to the poll result that shows that 20% of poll respondents are not taking their drugs as prescribed due to cost concerns, said, "Most troubling, and something that concerns physicians the most, is the significant increase in patients who do not fill prescriptions because of the high cost. This is unacceptable and exactly the reason we are here today."

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Public Officials Welcomed the Information The Poll Provides

Representative Sean Scanlon said, “Today's poll results confirmed what we have long known: that Connecticut consumers are desperate for change when it comes to prescription drug affordability. I look forward to working hard between now and the end of the legislative session to pass HB 5384 – a comprehensive bill with bipartisan support that will heed the calls of our constituents and bring transparency and immediate relief to Connecticut consumers when it comes to drug prices.”

Senator Len Fasano said, “For several years I have been honored to work with Senator Looney to implement significant health care reforms in Connecticut with bipartisan support. Last year our efforts resulted in Connecticut passing legislation that we hope will lead our nation in banning gag clauses that prevent pharmacists from sharing price information with patients and eliminating claw backs that result in patients paying more than a prescription actually costs. This survey released today confirms that concerns about the rising cost of prescription drugs cross party lines, and there is bipartisan support for legislative action. When one out of five respondents reports skipping their medication or cutting pills in half to save money, we know we have a problem. I want to thank the Universal Health Care Foundation for their work on these issues and look forward to continuing to work with Senator Looney and others to make health care, including potentially lifesaving and necessary prescription drugs, affordable and accessible for Connecticut residents.”

Comptroller Kevin Lembo said, “This report proves what we already know – that the vast majority of consumers, no matter their political affiliation, demand action on prescription drug pricing reform. We have developed a plan, now progressing in the state legislature, to deliver financial relief directly to consumers at the pharmacy counter. This plan, to deliver drug pricing transparency for the first time in Connecticut, will shine a bright light onto a shadowy market and extend free-market fairness to the pharmaceutical marketplace. The journey between drug manufacturer and consumer is a long one – dotted with many deals, payments and wealth exchange along the way. As if the consumer cost at the counter wasn't enough, most of us are paying massive, often inexplicable, drug price markups without even realizing it – through our insurance premiums, our taxes and in the cost of doing business with any employer. We must establish a state review process to answer essential questions: Is there a rationalization for sending drug costs skyward – by sometimes hundreds or even thousands of percent – for drugs on the market for sometimes years? Are these profits fueling research and development? If so, then here's an opportunity to demonstrate that.”

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About Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut

Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut serves as a catalyst that engages residents and communities in shaping a health system that provides universal access to quality, affordable health care and promotes health in Connecticut.

About the Healthcare Value Hub

With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Healthcare Value Hub provides information about the policies and practices that address high healthcare costs and poor quality, bringing better value to consumers. The Healthcare Value Hub monitors, translates and disseminates evidence, as well as connects advocates, researchers and policymakers together to further conversations and action around the cost and value of healthcare. The Hub is part of Altarum, a nonprofit organization with the mission of creating a better, more sustainable future for all Americans by applying research-based and field-tested solutions that transform our systems of health and healthcare.