

Campaign against high cost of medicine in New Mexico

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ALBUQUERQUE— Citing new data that big drug companies have taken advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to raise prices on hundreds of medications, AARP New Mexico, Health Action New Mexico and a statewide coalition of health experts, patient advocates and consumers launched New Mexico Consumers for Affordable Prescriptions Nov. 17, calling on legislators to ensure all New Mexicans have access to affordable medications.

“New Mexicans continue to struggle to afford the prescription drugs they need,” Barbara Webber, Executive Director of Health Action New Mexico, said. “Drug costs were out of control before COVID, but it is even worse now. No one should have to choose between their medication and other necessities, like rent and groceries.”

According to the data firm, Analysource, pharmaceutical companies have taken advantage of the pandemic to raise prices almost six percent on 645 brands in the first eight months of 2020.

On average, Americans pay four times as much for the same medicines as people in other countries.

The Journal of the American Medical Association reports 35 big drug companies raked in \$8.6 trillion in profits between 2000 and 2018.

Nine of the top ten companies spend more money on marketing and advertising than they do on researching new drugs.

“Enough is enough,” Joseph P. Sanchez, AARP New Mexico State Director, said. “Even before COVID-19, Americans were paying the highest drug prices in the world. It is

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unconscionable that prices may have increased even more during the pandemic.

“New Mexico needs an independent body that can evaluate drug costs and set reasonable rates for consumers to pay. With the establishment of the Prescription Drug Affordability Board, New Mexicans will have an advocate to ensure they are not being price gouged by drug companies,” he added.

The coalition launched a website at newmexicocap.org to educate and activate New Mexicans on state policy options to reduce drug costs. A Prescription Drug Affordability Board would regulate prescription drugs with costs that greatly impact New Mexicans, including high-cost, brand name medications. High costs can prevent patients from accessing the prescription drugs they need, cause significant affordability issues for the state, and threaten public health.

The Board would consider a broad range of economic factors when setting appropriate payment rates for reviewed drugs, allowing pharmaceutical manufacturers the opportunity to justify existing drug costs. Once a fair payment rate is determined, the Board sets an upper payment limit that applies to all purchasers and payor reimbursements in New Mexico, ensuring that lower costs benefit consumers.

Staffing the Board would be funded by a fee on pharmaceutical manufacturers.

“Prescription drug companies are the only businesses in the health care industry whose rates are not regulated. It’s time to hold them to the same standard as all other health care providers. Creating a Prescription Drug Affordability Board is a commonsense solution to hold big drug companies accountable and drive down the cost of prescription drugs,” Webber said.