

Press Release

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Iowans demand an end to skyrocketing prescription drug prices

Health care advocates bring together Iowans and elected officials

Des Moines/August 25—Two hundred fifteen Iowans affected by the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs told Governor Vilsack and staff members of Senator Grassley, Senator Harkin, and Representative Boswell that the time has come for pharmaceutical manufacturers to radically cut their prices. Seniors, people with disabilities, the uninsured, and their advocates called upon the state of Iowa and the federal government to take on the pharmaceutical manufacturers. Participants advocated that Iowa and the Medicare program should do what insurance companies, the Veteran's Administration, other states, and other countries like Canada already do: leverage lower prices by direct negotiation with the drug companies.

"This was a great opportunity for people to speak out about the prohibitive cost of prescription drugs," said **Betty Ahrens**, co-executive director of Iowa Citizen Action Network Education Foundation. "These price increases affect not only seniors and people with disabilities but everyone who has no prescription drug coverage. The failure of the new Medicare law to bring down prices proves that pharmaceutical manufacturers are not going to lower their prices unless we make them." Ahrens pointed to a report released last week by Iowa Citizen Action Network, "Iowans Face Rising Drug Cost Burden" that showed Iowa is harder hit than most states by increases in drug prices.

"I represent the safety net for the uninsured in the Des Moines area," said **Lorrie Jagiello**, pharmacy director for Community Access Pharmacy in Des Moines. We're helping to solve the medication problems of the uninsured. If we were able to negotiate for better prices, our grant funding would go much farther in allowing us to provide medications to some of central Iowa's most vulnerable patients."

"Because I don't have prescription drug coverage, I spend an enormous amount of time and energy figuring out how and where to get my medications," said **Janet Barnard**, a Medicare participant living with multiple disabilities caused by a series of strokes in 1999. "And if this maze of decision making isn't bad enough, the prices keep going up and up but my fixed income doesn't."

"The problem for so many people, including those with Medicare, is that drug prices are so high and keep going higher. We need to use the power of government to lower these prices and expand access," said **Ahrens**.

The forum was sponsored by Iowa Citizen Action Network Education Foundation and Iowa for Health Care.

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