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Most Americans want government to negotiate lower drug prices for Medicare patients

They also say drug costs are ‘Unreasonable,’ although they can still afford them

Americans expressed a strong preference for the government to begin negotiating with drug companies on behalf of Medicare patients for lower prices on medications, which most consider too high, according to a new poll from the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Below is the report on the new research by Phil Galewitz of Kaiser Health News.

Nearly three in four Americans say the costs of prescription drugs are “unreasonable” — and most blame drugmakers for those prices, according to a poll released Tuesday.

The survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found 74 percent of those taking prescription drugs find the costs unreasonable, as do 72 percent of those not taking such drugs. (KHN is an editorially independent program of the foundation.)

The poll builds on the results of an earlier Kaiser survey in April that identified high drug costs as the public’s top health care priority for Congress and the president.

Drug costs have gained attention in the past year in part as a result of controversies surrounding Sovaldi and other new hepatitis C drugs, which can cure most cases of the deadly liver disease but at a price of \$84,000 for a 12-week treatment. The high cost has strained Medicaid and Medicare budgets and left private insurers scrambling.

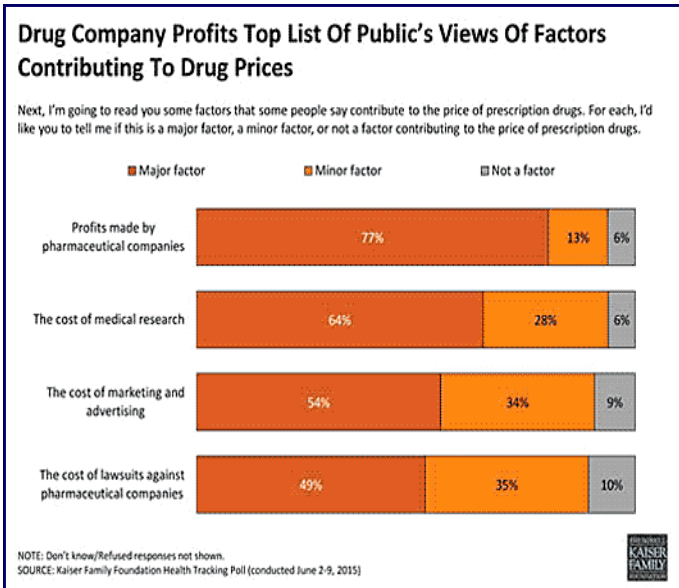
About 10 percent of respondents also blame insurance companies, saying they require enrollees to shoulder too great a share of drug costs.

The survey also found most Americans are still not paying attention to the latest challenge to the Affordable Care Act in a case called King v. Burwell. The Supreme Court is expected to decide this month whether to cut off government subsidies to millions of people in about three dozen states that rely on a federal insurance marketplace, rather than a state-based marketplace. About 72 percent of respondents say they have heard little or nothing about the case.

However, the survey found more than half of respondents were “very” or fairly closely” following news about the 2016 presidential campaign. About 39 percent of respondents said they were closely following news about the House of Representatives banning abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy — the most closely followed health policy issue.

The poll of 1,200 adults, conducted from June 2 to June 9, had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Most American Want Government to Help Seniors with High Cost of Medications	
Would you favor or oppose allowing the federal government to negotiate with drug companies to get a lower price on medications for people on Medicare?	
Strongly favor	63%
Somewhat favor	24%
Somewhat oppose	5%
Strongly oppose	4%
Don't Know/ Refused	4%





Look Who's Turning 80: Social Security Announces Countdown to Agency's 80th Anniversary 53 Days to Social Security's 80th

Anticipation fills the air as Social Security gets closer to the agency's historic 80th anniversary and prepares to commemorate the August 14, 1935, signing of the Social Security Act. Acting Commissioner Carolyn W. Colvin today announced the launch of the agency's event-filled celebration, with many activities leading up to August 14.

"Social Security offers hope and protection for millions of people and some of the most vulnerable members of the American public," Acting Commissioner Colvin said. "This was President Franklin Roosevelt's vision in 1935, and the vision has never been clearer, nor has the work of our agency ever been more important than it is today."

Observing this important milestone would not be complete without the participation of the agency's employees and the public. To engage the public, Social Security launched a commemorative 80th anniversary website, where they will learn more about the agency's legacy and the importance of the Social Security program. The website, www.socialsecurity.gov/80thanniversary can be used by the public to submit stories that show how Social Security has benefited them or their families. Social Security employees around the country are expressing their enthusiasm and support through the agency's "Why I Serve" campaign, which highlights employees telling their own stories illustrating why they enjoy giving back through public service.

The agency also has planned several additional events, such as celebrating "America's Favorites: Baseball, Hot Dogs, Apple Pie & SSA" Night that will include a ball game between the Baltimore Orioles and the Oakland A's and at other games around the country. Stay tuned to the [80th Anniversary website](#) for information on exciting upcoming events as they are planned!

"As I reflect on our agency's rich history, I am deeply honored to be a part of such a great organization with employees who truly embody the spirit of passionate public service," Acting Commissioner Colvin said. "There is nothing more rewarding than making a difference in the lives of others, and with our collective commitment, there is no limit to what we can achieve. *Happy 80th Anniversary, Social Security!*"

White House Conference on Aging or a Summit on Seniors?

The White House has announced it will hold its [White House Conference on Aging](#) (WHCOA) on July 13th. This event is held once every decade, as initially mandated by Congress in 1965.

Fifty years in, what's new? If you have a look at the WHCOA website, it doesn't seem like much. Take this headline as evidence: "2015 marks the 50th anniversary of Medicare, Medicaid, and the Older Americans Act, as well as the 80th anniversary of Social Security."

Apart from celebrating institutional endurance, the WHCOA sees itself as "an opportunity to... look ahead to the issues that will help shape the landscape for older Americans for the next decade."

This is an antiquated approach that will not lead to the innovations and policy changes needed in order to turn 21st century longevity into a social and economic opportunity for *all* Americans as we age. Not just *older* Americans. In fact, if the White House is serious about several of its clearly critical themes -- take elder abuse, for example -- it will use the unique symbol of a once a decade event on aging to debunk the myths and stigma of aging and in the course give stronger and more powerful voice precisely to topics like elder abuse.

If the WHCOA is only, or even principally, about finding better ways to take care of seniors -- as it was in 1965 -- then it is missing a huge opportunity. And, in fact, it's not a conference on *aging* at all. It should be called the White House Conference on Senior Care. So let's put the aging back in this aging conference, and use it to prompt new, innovative thinking on ways that this massive, unprecedented transformation can become the foundation for the third American Century. If we get this one right, I can assure you seniors will also benefit in ways today barely even imagined....[Read More](#)



Prescription drug price battles show no sign of letting up - driving Medicare cost up billions

New drugs to fight heart disease projected to cost up to \$12,000 a year; 10 new drugs could cost Medicare \$31 billion

By *Jordan Shapiro, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*



The decision last week by experts at the Food and Drug Administration to endorse a pair of medicines aimed at combating heart disease brought on the latest round of hand-wringing over prescription drug costs.

The drugs, which work to reduce cholesterol, are projected to cost anywhere from **\$7,000 to \$12,000** annually once on the market. Patients will bear some of that cost, but the bulk will be paid by private insurance companies or the government through Medicare and Medicaid.

The endorsement of alirocumab and evolocumab by FDA panels this week has renewed concerns about the affordability of new specialty drugs that offer hope to millions of Americans. Whether patients can access, or afford, these new drugs will be a sticking point for years to come.

It's a familiar tale. As science and technology advance, drug companies are able to create therapies that are more effective than ever. But the cost of these treatments has skyrocketed and put a strain on the entire health care sector.

When a new line of hepatitis C drugs was approved starting in 2013, attention immediately focused on the price. The initial drug, Sovaldi, was dubbed a "miracle" because it can cure the chronic liver condition with a single treatment.

But its staggering cost of \$1,000 per pill — \$84,000 for a standard 12-week course — immediately raised concerns. The government, health insurers and pharmacies, fearing rising costs, rushed to drive down the price through market pressure and restrictions on who could get the drug...[Read More](#)

Congressional Bills Would Mandate Equal Coverage For Pills And IV Cancer Therapy

By *Michelle Andrews*

A bipartisan group of House and Senate legislators introduced **bills** last week that would require health plans to cover the growing number of oral chemotherapy pills as favorably as they do intravenous chemotherapy. But an insurance trade group says that as long as drugmakers continue to increase the prices of the oral drugs, parity legislation amounts to a "shell game" that will push everyone's premiums.

In recent years, states have passed oral chemotherapy parity laws at a steady clip. They're on the books in 39 states and the District of Columbia, according to the American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network.

A federal law would ensure equal access across all states, says Anna Howard of the ACS Cancer Action Network.

Proponents also say the bill is needed to because private self-funded health plans that pay their employee claims directly generally don't have to comply with state parity laws.

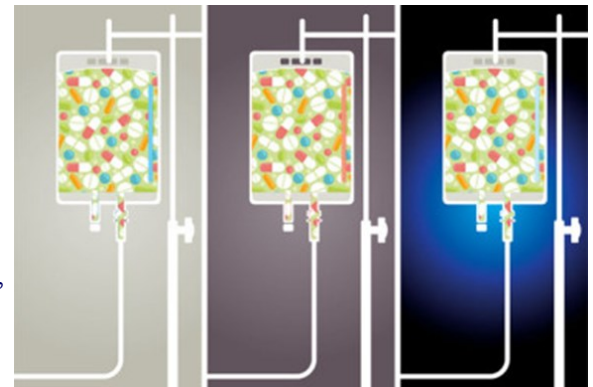
About a quarter of chemotherapy drugs in the pipeline are oral cancer medications, Howard says.

This KHN story can be republished for free ([details](#)).

Similar bills that were introduced in the previous congressional session didn't advance. It's unclear that the current bills have any better chance.

Patients who receive intravenous chemotherapy typically pay a flat copayment (perhaps \$50) for an outpatient visit. Oral chemotherapy pills are covered under a plan's pharmacy benefit, however, **where they're often placed in higher cost tiers** that may require coinsurance of 20 percent or more that for some drugs can run thousands of dollars.

Under the health law, consumers are limited in how much they can be required to pay out of pocket annually for care. (The only exception is for enrollees in plans that are grandfathered under the law.) In 2015, **those limits** are \$6,600 for individuals and \$13,200 for family coverage...[Read More](#)



A Word from Dr. Pfenninger: Cognitive aging: 'Why did I come into the kitchen?'

Dr. John L. Pfenninger for the Daily News



Yup. I've been there, too. What did I go to the basement for? Why was I going to call my brother? Is this normal? There is always the fear of early senility or Alzheimer's when this happens. What is the normal aging process for the way our brains think? What is "normal cognitive aging"?

The Institute of Medicine just released a report entitled "Cognitive Aging: Progress and Understanding and Opportunities for Action." As people get older, there is a gradual change in their thinking capacity (cognitive function). Memory and reaction time can be measured and do, predictably, decrease. Other functions, such as wisdom and knowledge, may increase over time. Mental aging occurs

in everyone regardless of initial cognitive function. Changes may be more apparent in those that engage in highly technical and fast-paced or timed tasks or situations that involve new learning.

Some decrease in mental functioning is not a disease. It's not Alzheimer's or another type of psychiatric disorder. Animal models show that neurons do not die with normal aging, as they do with Alzheimer's, which explains why some functions actually improve with age. However, the connections between neurons (synapses) are diminished, resulting in diminished overall brain function. The IOM report uses this bit of information to suggest that there are ways to improve our thinking as we age. We all want to maintain our optimal functioning. "Staying mentally sharp" is one of the primary health concerns of older adults. We all want to continue to drive, make financial decisions and more. Unfortunately, older adults lose an estimated \$2.9 billion a year to financial fraud because of decreasing mental capacity...[Read More](#)

Hope for millions of senior citizens facing heart failure found in new research

Adding protein vinculin helps fruit flies extend lives 150%

Millions of senior citizens threatened by heart failure, a disease of aging marked by a weak pumping heart, could possibly see their lives significantly extended by the protein vinculin. At least there is the hint of this possibility in new research published this week.

The new findings about the role of vinculin, the researchers say, could pave the way to treatments that extend the lives of 8 million people in the United States over the next decade.

Most strikingly, the federally funded study found that fruit flies whose genes were induced to precision-boost vinculin production only in the heart, sparing other organs, survived, on average, 150 percent longer than their vinculin-deficient counterparts.

The research was conducted in fruit flies, rats and monkeys by scientists at Johns Hopkins, UC San Diego, and other institutions.

It reveals that levels of a protein called vinculin increase with age to alter the shape and performance of cardiac muscle cells — a healthy adaptive change that helps sustain heart muscle vitality over many decades...[Read More](#)



The New England ARA state affiliates are actively pursuing these Petitions.

Petition Subject: Observation Status: "Current Hospital Issues in the Medicare Program"

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SIGN THE PETITION!!!!**

Petition Subject: House Concurrent Resolution 37 and Senate Concurrent Resolution 12 to get power doors installed in Post Offices and other federal buildings.

ADD
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**Get The Message Out:
SIGN THE PETITION!!!!**

Petition Subject: Elimination of the Unfair GPO and WEP Provisions of the Social Security Act to make sure the Congress of the United States enacts legislation, HR 3118 & S 896

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SIGN THE PETITION!!!!**