



Public Comments

Emerson Hamlin, political organizer for Oregon Nurses Association, executive committee member of the Oregon Coalition for Affordable Prescriptions Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services: Drug Pricing Hearing December 7, 2023

The Oregon Nurses Association is a nurses union and professional association representing over 16,000 health care workers and providers, including registered nurses, advanced practice nurses, and allied health workers. Our members work in urban and rural hospitals, clinics, school-based health centers, home health, and county health departments across Oregon. ONA is also a proud member of the Oregon Coalition for Affordable Prescriptions (OCAP). OCAP is a diverse coalition of organizations and advocates that work to increase transparency in the prescription drug industry, and rein in drug prices.

Both ONA and OCAP are grateful for the work of the legislature and the Prescription Drug Affordability Board. Their efforts to increase transparency and to lower drug costs for consumers is deeply appreciated and sets our state on the path to ensure that everyone can get the medication they need without financial hardship. However, we recognize that there is more work to be done: in OHA's report entitled "Impact of Health Care Costs on People in Oregon, 2021," released in September of 2023, 26% of Oregonians reported that they had cut pills in half, skipped doses, or did not fill a prescription due to the medication's cost. For those who did receive health care services, including medication, 13% reported that doing so used up all or most of their savings.

These considerable financial impacts affect consumers using generics, in addition to those using brand name drugs widely known to be expensive. One of the key findings of DCBS' recently released report, "Prescription Drug Price Transparency Program Results and Recommendations" was that the largest price increases were for generic drugs. The median price increase reported for generic drugs was 20 percent, while the median increase for brand name drugs was 14.9 percent. With low-cost options disappearing, it is clear Oregonians need help.

These reports mirror what our nurses and allied healthcare workers see. One family nurse practitioner, or FNP, I spoke with shared that she had a patient who came to her with very severe COPD, after lacking health insurance and being unable to afford medication for years. She arranged for him to see a Pulmonologist and she prescribed him medications and inhalers. Unfortunately, the years without treatment were insurmountable, and he died of respiratory failure several months after their first visit. When reflecting on his life and treatment, the FNP said that she believed that if he had access to affordable treatment and medication earlier, he would likely be alive today.

This FNP is not alone. Another nurse told me that making sure her patients got the care they needed, including medication, was emotionally exhausting. The uncertainty and worry that they may not be able to afford their necessary treatments kept her up at night. Our health care providers, their patients and families, and our communities across Oregon deserve better.



Both ONA and OCAP respectfully ask DCBS, PDAB, and the legislature to continue to work towards transparency in drug pricing and lowering the cost of prescription drugs. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Emerson Hamlin