

Senator Rosen's Aging Committee Field Hearing Focused on Lowering Prescription Drug Costs for Nevada Seniors

Witness Testimony

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I first want to take a moment to thank Senator Rosen for hosting this committee meeting focused on an extremely important topic of prescription drug costs and how it impacts our Nevada Seniors.

Hello, my name is Dr. Christina Madison. I am the founder and CEO of the public health consulting firm The Public Health Pharmacist, PLLC, a clinical pharmacist and associate professor of pharmacy practice. I have been training the next generation of allied health professionals including pharmacy student and pharmacy resident as well as medical, physician assistance, and nurse practitioner students for the past 15 years.

My nearly two-decade career has been spent counseling patients on how to treat and prevent the spread of infectious diseases. For the past two and half years, I have been working overtime on the COVID-19 response providing vaccinations, testing, and treatment. Facilitating the administration of over 12,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccines. Now I'm helping to coordinate the Monkeypox response through increased access to vaccinations which are currently in limited supply. My work over the years — and especially during the pandemic — has put a spotlight on the need to focus on health equity, which includes access to affordable prescription medications.

It is honor and privilege to provide witness testimony as a public health advocate who has dedicated my professional career to caring for underserved and vulnerable populations.

I'm thrilled to be sitting here with you today following the recent passage and signing into law of the Inflation Reduction Act by President Biden on August 16th. This new law is an historic down payment on deficit reduction to fight inflation; invests in domestic energy production and manufacturing; and will reduce carbon emissions by roughly 40% by 2030.

More pertinent to this hearing is the fact that this law will also allow Medicare to negotiate for prescription drug prices and extend the expanded Affordable Care Act program for three years, through 2025.

Our country is on the verge of another healthcare crisis and Seniors across Nevada are struggling with affordable care and coverage. Addressing health disparities and inequities is one of the main focuses of public health. As patient advocate, I know firsthand the importance of making sure patients basic needs are met, which includes making sure they have access to their medications by making them more affordable.

Understanding that Seniors, in particular, those in the BIPOC community, are facing more than just issues with their medications, but just getting to their doctor's visits in the first place, as well as structural racism and historic trauma.

With most senior taking multiple medications and having issue with "polypharmacy" we know that several are having to make the difficult decision of paying rent, groceries or gas before

paying for their prescription medications. More and more are accessing food pantries and donations to supplement getting their basic needs met in order to afford their medications while living on fixed incomes. The passage of the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 is going to make a meaningful and measurable difference in the lives of Nevada Seniors.

Nevada residents are being disproportionately impacted by high prescription drug prices. (per AARP)

202,674 Nevadans have been diagnosed with Diabetes

260,763 Nevadans have been diagnosed with Asthma and/or COPD

231,724 Nevadans have been diagnosed with cancer

These are three very expensive disease states that require chronic high-cost prescription medications

For example, between 2015 and 2020 the price of

- Victoza which is a medication to treat diabetes went from \$7,936 to \$11,300/per year
- Revlimid used to treat some forms of cancer went from \$185,574 to \$267,583/per year
- Spiriva Handihaler used to treat COPD went from \$3,886 to \$5,289/per year

This represents a significant price increase that far exceeds normal increases due to inflation.

These are just a couple of examples of the exorbitant drug costs that Seniors are experiencing.

As I work with non-profits and community partners I see that more and more people are accessing these types of social services that ever before.

Everything costs more, but that shouldn't include necessary lifesaving medications.

I've conducted many "medication review" sessions called Brown Bag events with Seniors in the community, and I often see them holding on to medications because they don't know when they may need it again. This is incredibly dangerous. Especially if they get these older meds mixed up with their newer medications. The first thing I do is ask them what their medical conditions are and why they are taking each of their medications. Often times there at least a few that they no longer have an indication for have a duplicate medication for and can safely discard. Ultimately, I know that this generation doesn't like to let things go because they are used to doing more with less and because they meds are so expensive, they just don't want to let them go.

Did you know the 20% of all medications are never picked up at the pharmacy? Typically, because of lack of transportation, perceived need, and cost. Reducing the cost of prescription medications through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 is going to help not just the cost of prescription drugs but people's quality of life because they will be able to afford other things.

Medications don't work if you don't take them. And you can't take your medications if you can't afford them.

That's why I'm relieved that Congress just passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which will help lower costs for Nevada seniors, including for many of the patients I serve every day. This new law will for the first time allow Medicare to negotiate for the lowest price of prescription drugs;

will cap seniors' out of pocket spending at \$2,000 per year; and will cap the price of insulin – a lifesaving drug for hundreds of thousands of Nevada seniors – at \$35 per month. Thank you to Senator Rosen and Congressional Democrats for working to pass this legislation, which will be a critical lifeline for so many of my patients here in Las Vegas.

I'm providing this testimony to bring attention to these issues and to discuss solutions for our struggling Nevadans so that they can live healthier and happier lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.