



February 22, 2023

TO: Senate Health Care Committee
FR: Maribeth Guarino, Health Care Advocate, Oregon State Public Interest Research Group (OSPIRG)
RE: In Support of SB 404 and PDAB Recommendations

My name is Maribeth Guarino and I am the health care advocate at OSPIRG. We are a statewide, citizen-based, public interest organization representing thousands of Oregonians. I am testifying in support of SB 404-1 and the recommendations of the Prescription Drug Affordability Board (PDAB) included in this bill.

The cost of prescriptions is a huge burden for Oregonians, resulting in 1 in 4 skipping a dose, not filling a prescription, or otherwise rationing their medication.¹ I'd like to share a few stories with you from Oregonians who have felt the burden of these high prices.

Shirley and LeRoy live in Portland, and Leroy suffers from a loss of vision in one eye. He's had surgery to relieve the pressure he experiences, and was prescribed Rhopressa, a tiny bottle of eyedrops not even a few inches tall. Each prescription is \$320 - and their insurance only saves a few dollars. They would need to fill that prescription a few times a year, and the cost really adds up, so Leroy doesn't fill the prescription and is instead dealing with that loss of vision and eye pain on his own.

Sally is a retired clinical social worker, and often saw others struggle with the cost of health care in her cases. Now, she is prescribed Enbrel, a tier 5 specialty drug (meaning that it's one of the most expensive drugs available even with insurance) that helps relieve joint pain. Unfortunately, she can't afford it, but she was able to apply to Safety Net Foundation, a nonprofit patient assistance program, which provides the drug at no cost. Safety Net Foundation is run by Amgen, the parent company for Enbrel's manufacturer Immunex Corporation. Sally is dependent on that manufacturer to continue providing her prescription.

Susan, whose written testimony is submitted, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer last year. She was enrolled in an insurance plan through her husband's employer, and had to jump through so many hoops to get her chemotherapy medication that she delayed her treatment, and ended up paying for it out-of-pocket - something she was only able to do with the financial help of several family members.

These are three stories out of hundreds. Oregonians are struggling every day with the cost of prescription drugs, but SB 404 and the recommendations of the PDAB to increase transparency across patient assistance programs, state-regulated insurers, and throughout the pharmaceutical supply chain can inform consumers, advocates, and policymakers on how we can lower prescription drug costs. In addition, the bill empowers the Prescription Drug Affordability Board to take direct action to lower the burden of high-cost prescription drugs on Oregonians by implementing upper payment limits (UPLs) on medications that are currently unaffordable.

These are the next steps to bringing the cost of prescriptions, and the cost of health care, under control in our state. For Oregonians like Leroy, Sally, and Susan, I urge you to support this bill.

¹ Altarum CHESS, 2021.

<https://www.healthcarevaluehub.org/advocate-resources/publications/oregon-residents-worried-about-high-drug-costs-support-range-government-solutions>