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Gov. Evers, Wisconsinites: Discuss Rising Prescription Drug Costs

Posted on Thursday, Mar 25, 2021

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers this week, together with the Office of the Commissioner of Insurance (OCI) Deputy Commissioner Nathan Houdek and Wisconsin Department of Health Services Secretary-designee Karen Timberlake hosted a roundtable discussion with Wisconsinites on the rising costs of prescription drugs.

"Picking up your medications shouldn't break the bank, but we know that too many Wisconsinites are having to make tough decisions between paying their bills and getting life-saving medication," said Gov. Evers. "They are cutting pills in half, skipping doses, rationing insulin, or just plain not filling prescriptions because it's the difference between paying for their medication or paying for rent, heat, or groceries—that's just wrong. Making sure folks have access to quality, affordable healthcare should be a bipartisan issue. Let's get this done."

The governor's Badger Bounceback agenda builds upon the work of the Governor's Task Force on Prescription Drug Prices which was established in 2019 and presented their policy recommendations to the governor in October of 2020. The governor's 2021-23 biennial budget includes a bold, comprehensive plan to tackle the rising costs of prescription drug prices with nearly 20 policy solutions to reduce and control costs, increase transparency and oversight, strengthen consumer protections, and bolster programs designed to support and protect Wisconsin's most vulnerable.

"The governor's Badger Bounceback budget includes the most comprehensive plan in the history of our state to improve prescription drug affordability, increase transparency, and ensure accessibility for Wisconsin's most vulnerable," said OCI Deputy Commissioner Nathan Houdek, who also served as the chair of the Governor's Task Force on Reducing Prescription Drug Prices.

The governor, deputy commissioner, and secretary-designee were joined by Wisconsinites across the state who have been affected by this crisis firsthand, including:

• Jill Kietzke, registered nurse and member of the American Diabetes Association, Mt. Horeb
• Jessica Smith, elder benefit specialist and State Health Insurance Assistance Program counselor with the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Eau Claire County, Eau Claire
• Nancy Koch, retired nurse, patient, and AARP advocate, West Allis
• Ben Wilson, community organizer, patient, and healthcare advocate, Viroqua
• Zena Blom, patient and advocate, Twin Lakes
• Thomas Slaten, patient and advocate, Edgerton

"I am a diabetic patient and I use three types of insulin every month. Total cost for that insulin I'm guessing, I don't have exact numbers in front of me, would reach $1,200 a month or more, and I am all for this $50 copay because there were so many months where I could not get insulin because I just could not afford it. I'm on a fixed income being retired and it just didn't fit into my budget at the time," said Thomas Slaten.

"I think the transparency and reporting across the drug supply chain is really important," said Jessica Smith. "I felt like the drug task force really started just uncovering a sort of almost like a secret world [where] we don't understand how things work. There needs to be a lot of more transparency."

"My medication retails for about $3,000 a month. My insurance will cover it, but leaves me with a $250 copay, which is something I can't afford every month. That's a car payment. That's utilities. That's a lot. That's two-and-a-half, three weeks of food," said Ben Wilson.

The roundtable discussion is available to watch on the governor's YouTube channel here.

Tonight, Thursday, March 25, 2021 at 6 p.m., the governor will be hosting the second of six Badger Bounceback Live Sessions focused on the topic of Healthcare Accessibility & Affordability. More on the governor's investments in healthcare accessibility and affordability is available here. Wisconsinites are invited to sign up to attend the governor's Badger Bounceback Live Session here.