Here is what we found out about prescription drug prices

We all know that prescription drug prices are high. But did you know that the price you pay at one pharmacy could be several times what you’d be charged at another pharmacy, for the same drug?

That’s the conclusion of U.S. PIRG Education Fund’s latest report, “The Real Price of Medications,” based on surveys of more than 250 pharmacies in 12 states from Massachusetts to Wisconsin to Arizona to Florida. CBS This Morning was among the media outlets that picked up the story.

Our survey found the majority of pharmacies selling common medications at vastly inflated prices—averaging almost nine times the cheapest available price. In just one example, the majority of pharmacies sold the same insulin (same drug, same dose) for $445 a month. The cheapest price we found was $96.

Counterintuitively, our research found that small chain stores and independent pharmacies tend to be less expensive than the big chain stores.

Healthcare remains a top concern among the public. Polling reveals that most people like their health plans; they just think they pay too much. And they’re right. One of the reasons is the cost of prescription drugs—which, it turns out, might be severely inflated depending on where you shop.

While consumers can shop around to save money right now, we shouldn’t face these hidden price discrepancies. They are bad for consumers struggling to pay for expensive medicine, they’re bad for our insurance premiums, they’re bad for public trust in our health care system, and worst of all, they’re bad for consumers’ health, as people ration their own medications.

“These real price variations we’re seeing have huge health consequences for Americans,” our national network’s Consumer Watchdog Adam Garber tells CBS News. “These prices are often how they determine how much insurers are going to pay for the drugs ... it sort of sets the whole pricing scheme up.”
Bipartisan momentum is building behind solutions, from patent reforms that would encourage more generic drugs, to transparency steps that would nudge the market toward greater competition. Others are looking at how to end price gouging on medications, which drives up cost without any benefit to our health. Red, purple and blue states, from Tennessee to Pennsylvania to Illinois, are looking at steps they can take to rein in high prescription drug prices. Oregon is already cutting waste in the health insurance industry, and California is making hospital prices more transparent, thanks to laws backed by the PIRGs in these states.

Americans want quality care at a fair price. PIRG remains committed to finding practical steps that government, industry and consumers can take to achieve just that.

How to get the best deal

Our research found that common life-saving medication prices varied greatly, even within the same state or city, undermining quality of care. Here are three tips for finding the best deal on your prescription medications.

1. Save big by shopping around
By shopping around, patients can save a total of $102 (on hypertension medication) to $5,400 (on an inhaler) off of the median prices of the surveyed medications annually.

2. Smaller pharmacies are cheaper
Eight of the 12 drugs surveyed were between eight percent and 840 percent more expensive at most large pharmacies when compared to smaller and independent pharmacies.

3. Generics offer more value
Switching to generic drugs, even years after they come onto the market, can save you a ton of money. For example, switching from brand-ed Nexium to its generic version could save patients an estimated $756 annually.

This report is a part of our PIRG Consumer Watchdog campaign, which alerts consumers to dangers in the marketplace.

**NEWS BRIEFS**

**BEYOND PLASTIC**

Maryland and Maine become the first states to ban plastic foam. Who’s next?

Maryland and Maine are the first states in the U.S. to put a plastic foam container ban on the books, but other states aren’t far behind.

On May 24, Maryland became the nation’s second state to ban polystyrene foam cups and containers, after Gov. Larry Hogan let the bill become law without his signature. Maine passed a polystyrene foam ban earlier this year. Maryland’s ban will go into effect on July 1, 2020, nearly a year sooner than Maine’s.

“These two states did something historic in becoming the first in the country to ban single-use plastic foam,” said Alex Truelove, director of our national network’s Zero Waste campaign. “Other states should seize the opportunity and follow suit.”
Legislatures in Oregon, New Jersey, Connecticut and Vermont are considering similar bans.

“Nothing we use for five minutes should be allowed to pollute our planet for hundreds of years,” said Alex. “I’m happy to know Maryland and Maine agree. Who’s next?”

**ZERO WASTE**

**What a waste: At least 30% of trash could be composted instead of buried or burned**

Each year, America landfills and incinerates enough organic material to fill a line of 18-wheelers stretching from New York to Los Angeles 10 times over.

On June 13, NCPIRG released “Composting in America,” a report by our national research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund, which shows that we could be composting at least 30 percent of our waste stream—and in the process pulling more carbon out of the atmosphere, returning more nutrients to our soil, and using fewer toxic chemical fertilizers.

“One person’s trash is another person’s treasure—especially when that trash can be turned into compost,” said Faye Park, president of U.S. PIRG Education Fund. “We constantly say to reduce, reuse and recycle. By reusing food waste and yard waste, we reduce our garbage and the negative impact it has on the earth and our health.”

“With composting, our organic waste—food scraps, paper towels, yard trimmings—could help us instead of hurt us,” said Alex Truelove, Zero Waste campaign director for U.S. PIRG Education Fund.

**HOLD THE ANTIBIOTICS: WENDY’S**

**We’re calling on Wendy’s to ‘Hold the Antibiotics’ from its beef supply chain**

How can the country’s third-largest burger chain help save the cornerstone of modern medicine? By buying only beef raised without the routine use of antibiotics.

On March 28, NCPIRG and our national network launched our campaign to convince Wendy’s to do just that. A new estimate suggests up to 162,000 Americans die from antibiotic-resistant infections every year. If we want to keep antibiotics working, companies such as Wendy’s need to stop sourcing beef from large, industrial livestock operations that overuse medically important antibiotics.

“We can’t waste life-saving medicines to produce cheap beef. Wendy’s can use its buying power to help move the beef industry away from overusing antibiotics,” said Matt Wellington, national director of our Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics campaign.

Wendy’s no longer serves chicken raised on medically important antibiotics. But the chain earned only a D- on the latest Chain Reaction scorecard put out by the Chain Reaction coalition, which includes our research partner U.S. PIRG Education Fund. The scorecard graded top burger chains on antibiotic use in their beef supply chains.

Support our work in the public interest by including a gift to NCPIRG or NCPIRG Education Fund in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: plannedgiving@ncpirg.org
BAN ROUNDUP

Public education, member action strengthen call to ban Roundup

The more we educate the public about Monsanto’s weedkiller, Roundup, the more support we find for banning the product—the residue of which can be found practically everywhere, from breakfast cereal to ice cream. In July, NCPIRG and our national network kicked off a summer public education drive in 15 states.

“Ever since the World Health Organization determined Roundup’s main ingredient, glyphosate, is a probable carcinogen, we have been warning the public,” said our Ban Roundup Campaign Director Kara Cook-Schultz.

“We’re doing all we can to get the facts to legislators about why we should ban Roundup until and unless it’s proven safe,” said NCPIRG Acting Director David Rossini. “The support and action of our members are making it easier to get state decision-makers to listen.”

Over the course of the summer, our canvassers enlisted more than 2,500 citizens statewide and 47,000 citizens nationwide to join our call on state leaders to ban Roundup.