

**Healthier Colorado Member Stories: Prescription Drug Stories
HB 19-1296: Prescription Drug Cost Reduction Measures**

"My name is Kate Scheer; I'm a graduate of the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs with a computer science degree, and I have bipolar type II. You can imagine the number of drugs I've been through over the last decade to try to manage it. I also have Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, which complicated my diagnosis. I was 30 years old before somebody told me that suicidal ideation wasn't normal with your menstruation cycle. So a key part of managing my mental health includes managing my hormonal balance, which means being on a good birth control. After years of struggle, I was finally prescribed Lo Loestrin Fe, which negated all the physical symptoms that kept me from working 3 days a month, minimized my emotional doomsday clock every month, and didn't interact with the other medications I'm on to battle hypomania, anxiety, depression and the occasional dip into suicidal. It was a necessary step in pinning down the right treatment for my bipolar type II. **Then my insurance changed its policies and the price of Lo Loestrin Fe became unaffordable.** I appealed, clarifying that it's a hormone therapy rather than birth control, but that appeal was denied. **My insurance wants me to try 16 other generics first- each at a 5-month time frame to prove they don't work- before I can go back to what does work.** I just finished the first 5 month trial of the 'closest generics' to Lo Loestrin and everything (physical and mental) was miserable, but I can't afford the price tag to being functional those three key days of the month. So I'm moving on to the second medication in that long list of 'comparable generics'. **Only 5 years and 14 medications to go..."**

- Kate Scheer, Colorado Springs

I recently went to fill a prescription at our local City Market pharmacy. I blithely walked to the counter, and they advised me that the cost was **\$448**. I told them that was ridiculous, and that they must not have the insurance information entered. They double checked and agreed that the insurance was incorrect. I thought that would mean a reasonable amount, but no, it brought the cost down to **\$389. That is more than my car payment. It is impossible. I did not get the prescription** and instead looked up the medication online. I obtained the identical medication - same brand name, same strength, same quantity - for \$11 from India. The Indian pharmacy must also make a profit. They are not in business as a charity. However, in Colorado, someone is making 40 times the amount they are making in India.

-Tamara Hamilton, Mancos

"My boyfriend has epilepsy and his doctor has had a difficult time controlling it with medications. His is frequently starting new meds and stopping others. This new pill he just started will cost him **\$960 each month until he meets his deductible. That's on top of the \$270 he already spends each month on his other two pills.** Luckily, he is fortunate enough that we can make this outrageous payment a few times until he meets his deductible, but **I know there are many people who wouldn't be able to.** Epilepsy has greatly impacted our day to day life, and we are trying our best to figure it out and try every option in hopes that it can be controlled. He has lost jobs due to his inability to perform job functions due to his epilepsy. **We are desperate to find a solution, but he shouldn't have to pay over \$1,200 every month to do so."**

-Sydney Smiley, Denver

"I'm on Breo Ellipta 100/25 Inhalation powder for COPD and asthma. The best-discounted price is at **\$425 per 30 doses**. So that means the prescription needs to be refilled monthly but due to the cost, I don't take it every day as prescribed. **I try to stretch it out to every 2-3 months which means that I'm not breathing well for most of the time.**"

-Brian Curtiss, Conifer

"I had basic cataract surgery and the drugs I needed were \$800. **That's nearly a month's income for me.** The remaining one was an antibiotic which cost about \$300."

-Jaclyn Stapert Evenson, Gunnison

"I am an RN and I was the director of Synagis Clinics. Synagis is a drug that prevents Respiratory Syncytial Virus in premature babies. RSV can cause serious problems and possibly death in children with underdeveloped lungs and children with chronic lung problems. In healthy children, over 2 years old, it usually just causes a cold. When I first started giving the drug, the premature babies received the drug from September through April. As the pharmaceutical company kept raising the price, the insurance companies made the guidelines stricter. The babies couldn't get the injection until November and the babies' prematurity went down from 32 weeks to 30 weeks. Again the insurance companies knocked it down from 5 injections to 3 injections and I had to spend hours getting authorizations for these babies. Also, if a child was over 2 years old with lung problems the insurance companies would not authorize the drug. **This was all because of the high cost.** When the patent was up, the pharmaceutical company changed the drug slightly so they could patent it for another 7 years. Unfortunately, a number of premature babies and children with chronic lung problems missed getting the drug because of the high cost and insurance not paying for it. **One shot could cost up to \$10,000 dollars due to the child's weight.** The drug worked well and helped our premature babies stay out of the hospital it was a shame that most parents couldn't afford the cost.."

-Rebecca Sullivan, Denver

"I moved to Colorado a little over a year ago, after a divorce. Being married for 16 years, I never had to worry about the cost of insurance or prescriptions. **Then I found myself alone and having to make a choice of paying for food, or insulin, versus paying for my insurance.** I have gone without insurance. Even with the exchange, I can't afford to maintain insurance, let alone meds, due to the large out of pocket cost. **Now with no insurance as a Type 1 Diabetic,** I have been blessed so far with insulin help from family and friends but soon I will be out of that goodwill and then my choice will be Canada or Mexico for my insulin because what **one month's worth of insulin costs here in the US, would be equal to almost a full mortgage payment** and I just can't afford that so essentially, I break the law to survive."

-Louise Zamudio, Colorado Springs

"Since insurers now decide what medications you may or may not have rather than our physicians, we must pay fully out of pocket for my husband's OxyContin, **which is over \$2,000 per month!** When you mention opioids these days, it is automatically presumed to be a *harmful* medication, but it is the **ONLY** medication my husband's system can tolerate. Every time the insurance company attempts to save money with his medications, they force my husband to try 5 different medications! My husband has extreme allergies to the additives in generic medications and he ends up in the ER, usually on verge of death when they switch him up like that. The doctors **ALL** tell the insurance company that my husband **CANNOT** take anything else.

We got generics that kill him. We got morphine pills that put him into comas, fentanyl that makes him comatose, and so on.

-Jeanne Marshall, Colorado Springs

"Our cardiologist prescribed a medication that would cost us **\$500 dollars per month!** This is a major issue for retirees who anticipate being on a lifelong medication as costly as this."

-Joan MacEachen, Durango

"I was shot in 1993. The bullet went through my lung. As a result, I was prescribed Albuterol. My drugs used to be practically free. But now I have to get my drugs from Canada otherwise they are unaffordable. I am also on a drug called Naprexa and that costs over \$100 per month which my psychiatrist prescribed me. I am currently on Medicare and that drug was a class 5 drug. **It was \$350 a month, approximately \$1500/month without insurance. Prescription drugs are unaffordable for me!**"

-Ellen Aknin, Denver