

December 3, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

I am writing to urge you to prevent the outrageous increase in Medicare Part B premiums associated with the potential approval of the Alzheimer's drug Aduhelm and to make sure that if this drug is covered by the program, it is reasonably priced.

Unless you take action soon, the standard monthly Medicare Part B premium paid by some 57 million beneficiaries will increase by 14.55 percent (from \$148.50 to \$170.10) beginning next year. This \$21.60 a month increase in Medicare premiums would be the largest in the 56-year history of Medicare and it could not come at a worse time for older Americans all over this country who are struggling economically.

According to Medicare officials, about half of the \$21.60 increase in Medicare Part B premiums is directly due to a "contingency reserve" the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) created to pay for Aduhelm as a precautionary measure if the agency eventually decides to approve it for Medicare recipients.

Incredibly and immorally, Biogen, the manufacturer of Aduhelm, has set the price of this Alzheimer's drug at \$56,000 even though the Institute for Clinical and Economic Review, an independent non-profit organization, has estimated that the maximum price of this drug should be no higher than \$3,000-\$8,400. This is a perfect example of why Medicare should be negotiating drug prices with the pharmaceutical industry.

If 1 million Medicare beneficiaries take Aduhelm, the Kaiser Family Foundation estimates total spending on the drug will reach \$57 billion in a single year. This is more than Medicare Part B spent on all drugs in 2019 (\$37 billion).

In my view, it would be absolutely unacceptable to force 57 million senior citizens to pay \$11.50 more a month in Medicare premiums due to Biogen's greed and thirst for massive profits for a drug that has not been proven to be effective by the scientific community and has been rejected for coverage by the Veterans Health Administration and at least a half a dozen private health insurance companies in the United States.

It would be equally unacceptable to force seniors suffering from Alzheimer's disease to come up with a 20 percent co-payment of \$11,200 out of their own pockets for Aduhelm – which is precisely what they would have to pay if Biogen is allowed to charge \$56,000 for this drug.

Therefore, I am urging you to direct the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to immediately prevent the \$11.50 a month increase in Medicare Part B premiums associated with Aduhelm from going into effect next year.

Further, I am asking you to instruct CMS to delay the approval of Aduhelm until the scientific community determines that it is safe and effective. At a time when 10 out of 11 experts on the Food and Drug Administration's advisory committee voted against approving Aduhelm, when the VA announced that it would not be covering Aduhelm due to safety concerns and the "lack of evidence of a robust and meaningful clinical benefit," and when at least a half a dozen private health insurance companies have also decided not to cover Aduhelm, neither should Medicare.

Finally, I would urge you to take executive action to reinstate and expand the reasonable pricing clause that was established in 1989 by the National Institutes of Health requiring drug makers to charge reasonable prices for prescription drugs and treatments that receive federal funding – a policy that was revoked in 1995.

Biogen's \$56,000 price of Aduhelm is the poster child for how dysfunctional our prescription drug pricing system has become. The notion that one pharmaceutical company can raise the price of one drug so much that it could negatively impact 57 million senior citizens and the future of Medicare is beyond absurd. With Democrats in control of the White House, the House and the Senate we cannot let that happen.

Thank you very much for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to working with you to lower the outrageous price of prescription drugs and expand and improve Medicare.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
UNITED STATES SENATOR