

## How to Talk About High Drug Prices: A Messaging Guide Developed from Focus Group Findings<sup>i</sup>

### THE PROBLEM

Voters feel that drug prices are out of control and blame drug company greed for the high costs. This issue is personal for many: They tell stories of having to skip expensive medications or make hard choices to afford prescription drugs. Voters get particularly angry when life-saving medications and treatments — like insulin or the EpiPen — experience a sharp increase in price after years on the market. For those reasons, voters support action by the federal government and their states to rein in drug prices.

Support for action includes Republican voters, who generally resist government intervention and prefer free market solutions. Voters in the focus groups see drug companies as monopolies that are unmotivated to reduce prices, and they see no alternative but to support government action. They view high drug prices as a threat to their health and the health of their families.

### What Solutions Are Voters Likely to Support?

Voters support reining in spending on the highest-cost medications, those needed to treat life-threatening conditions like cancer, as well as commonly used drugs that have seen price hikes in recent years. They also want more transparency in drug pricing and strongly support requiring drug companies to provide clear and understandable information about drugs' real costs.

### Who Voters Trust on Drug Pricing

Voters want to hear from people with disabilities, those with chronic conditions, older adults, and regular people, not drug or health care industry leaders.

- » They trust the patient voice most on this issue — even more than the voice of health professionals.

<sup>i</sup> Families USA and PerryUndem conducted three focus groups on drug pricing: one in Denver, Colorado (11/4/19) and two in Newark, New Jersey (11/7/19). The Denver focus group consisted of voters of mixed party affiliation. In Newark, one focus group was held with Republican voters, and the other with Democratic voters.

- » A smaller group of voters trust and want to hear from health centers, doctors, nurses, and hospitals.
- » Voters across all party demographics trust elected officials much less.
- » Voters do not want to hear from insurance or pharmaceutical companies about drug pricing.
- » Most voters in our focus groups were unsure what a pharmacy benefit manager was, so initiatives taking on those actors in the drug pricing realm face additional challenges.

## Voters Don't Buy the Industry's Leading Talking Points

- » Most voters dismiss attacks from pharmaceutical companies about the potential negative impacts of drug pricing legislation and feel these companies are only looking out for their bottom line.
- » Voters know these companies make large profits and do not believe they will reduce research and development (R&D) into new drugs because of drug pricing legislation.
- » Many voters suggest these companies should simply redirect some of their large advertising budgets toward research into new drugs.

Messaging Concepts That <i>Work</i>	Messaging Concepts to <i>Avoid</i>
Frame how much companies spend on advertising vs. research and development (R&D) as “a matter of priorities.” This works across party affiliations.	Do not say that companies have to put “skin in the game” and accept lower profits while working just as hard to develop lifesaving medications. This alienates Republican-leaning voters.
Highlight how drug companies hire and fire people at will. This helps counter the narrative that legislation would be a “job killer.”	Avoid using arguments that involve the “free market”; the term activates voters’ concerns about government regulation hurting innovation.
Focus on how patients will be affected by legislation, and be specific about how it will help people in the state.	Avoid highlighting new government bureaucracy. Voters generally don’t trust government or fear that their state could “mess up” the job of controlling drug prices. Avoiding messages about the process or official government bodies involved may help calm those fears.
Highlight the high salary of drug company CEOs. Voters generally believe that companies have enough money and often reference CEO pay as evidence.	

## It is crucial that messages stay focused on the impacts on patients. Don't get distracted by messages that go after pharmaceutical companies.

Give an example of a medication that can have a positive impact on health but is too costly for many to afford. This is powerful. Also, remind voters that medications are often a matter of life and death for patients.

Consider using some of the language voters used in the focus groups: "Profits are not more important than people." "We shouldn't have to think twice about taking care of ourselves." Another voter offered this message: "The best reason to pass this bill is to ensure my family always has a fair chance to get the lifesaving medications they need."

### SAMPLE MESSAGE:

*Medicines don't save lives if people can't afford them. For example, a new treatment for hepatitis C, a life-threatening condition, can cure most people, but it also costs tens of thousands of dollars. For new treatments like this, insurance may pay for only a portion of the costs, or may not cover these treatments at all. This can mean that only the rich get a cure for a disease that affects people of all income levels.. Working people need the government to set basic limits that put necessary drugs within reach of those who need them most.<sup>ii</sup>*

<sup>ii</sup> This message is very similar to the message tested in previous focus groups, and our results confirm that this is a strong leading message on the issue.

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