



## CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS

*Joaquín Castro* | *Chairman*

116<sup>th</sup> Congress

April 10, 2020

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As members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), we write to you today with concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and the diabetes community in the United States. As you know, addressing the high cost of insulin has been a top priority for the CHC during the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress. We appreciate the time you and your leadership team took to meet with our members last year to discuss your efforts to make insulin more affordable to individuals living with diabetes. As our nation braces for the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to continue to raise this issue and the health concerns unique to the diabetes community. This concerns our caucus as Latino adults have more than a 50% chance of developing Type 2 diabetes, and at an even younger age than the average person.<sup>1</sup>

While COVID-19 is a new virus and research remains limited, we understand that health outcomes are worse for those living with chronic illnesses like Type 1 or Type 2 Diabetes. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently list diabetes as one of the chronic illnesses that puts individuals at high-risk for severe illness should they contract this new virus.<sup>2</sup> Preliminary

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2019. *Hispanic/Latino Americans And Type 2 Diabetes*. <<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/features/hispanic-diabetes.html>> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020. *People Who Are At Higher Risk For Severe Illness*. <<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/people-at-higher-risk.html>> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

reports coming out of China indicate that the case-fatality rate (CFR) was higher for those with underlying health conditions. According to reports, COVID-19 patients in China with diabetes had a CFR of 7.3 percent.<sup>3</sup> A CDC report published on March 31, 2020 with preliminary data on COVID-19 patients in the United States reaffirms these findings. From the COVID-19 patients with underlying health conditions reported to the CDC between February 12<sup>th</sup> and March 28<sup>th</sup>, 784 were reported to be individuals with diabetes, and out of those patients, 251 patients were hospitalized, and another 148 patients were placed in Intensive Care Units (ICU).<sup>4</sup>

During this public health crisis, experts are advising individuals with chronic conditions to prepare with at least 30-days' worth of their medical supplies, and that a 90-day supply would be most optimal.<sup>5</sup> While we are reassured by statements that your supply chains are not compromised under the pressure of this health crisis, and we know each company has its own version of patient assistance programs (PAPs), we believe these extraordinary circumstances demand a robust and rapid response in order to save lives.

The recommendation that individuals have 30 to 90 days of supplies would raise fewer alarms were it not for the high price of insulin and the diabetes-related medical equipment that are essential for people living with diabetes. Stockpiling insulin supplies to last between 30 to 90 days could require an investment of thousands of dollars—something that is nearly impossible for many Americans who are already struggling to afford insulin, and even more so for the millions losing their jobs during this pandemic. According to the United States Department of Labor (DOL), another 6.6 million Americans filed unemployment claims during the week ending on April 4, 2020.<sup>6</sup> The most recent numbers bring the total to 16.8 unemployment claims in the last three weeks. Even before the current public health crisis, we already heard stories of Americans rationing their insulin because of its high cost. In fact, one in four Americans reported insulin rationing because of the cost.<sup>7</sup> As you know, insulin rationing endangers the health of diabetics because hyperglycemia can lead to many complications, including a depressed immune system that may put patients at a higher risk for contracting COVID-19.

As the three major insulin manufacturers, we know that many of the existing PAPs often offer limited insulin products, and we urge you to consider additional steps to ensure greater patient access to insulin during this difficult time. As millions of Americans continue to lose their jobs and employer-sponsored health insurance in the coming weeks, we believe this unprecedented public health crisis calls for new and bold actions that match the moment. For example, Eli Lilly and Company's recent announcement that it will begin capping the out-of-pocket cost for insulin

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<sup>3</sup> Wu, PhD, Z. and M. McGoogan, PhD, J., 2020. *Characteristics Of And Important Lessons From The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Outbreak In China Summary Of A Report Of 72 314 Cases From The Chinese Center For Disease Control And Prevention*. *Jama Network*. <<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2762130?resultClick=1>> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020. *Preliminary Estimates of the Prevalence of Selected Underlying Health Conditions Among Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 — United States, February 12–March 28, 2020*. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6913e2externalicon>> [Accessed 2 April 2020].

<sup>5</sup> Robert H. Shmerling, M., 2020. *COVID-19: If You're Older And Have Chronic Health Problems, Read This - Harvard Health Blog*. *Harvard Health Blog*. <<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/covid-19-if-youre-older-and-have-chronic-health-problems-read-this-2020040119396>> [Accessed 2 April 2020].

<sup>6</sup> Department of Labor. 2020. *Unemployment Insurance Weekly Claims*. <<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OPA/newsreleases/ui-claims/20200592.pdf>> [Accessed 9 April 2020].

<sup>7</sup> Herkert, BS, D., Vijayakumar, BA2, P. and Luo, MD, MPH3; et al, J., 2019. *Cost-Related Insulin Underuse Among Patients With Diabetes*. *Jama Network*. <<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/article-abstract/2717499>> [Accessed 1 April 2020].

at \$35 per month is indicative of how companies can help curb mounting healthcare costs during this challenging financial moment.

We respectfully request additional information on what your companies are doing to lower the list price of insulin, as well as any additional steps that your company is taking to ensure insulin is affordable and accessible in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for your attention and prompt response to our inquiry.

Sincerely,

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