

Report: Drug price spikes threaten patient health, economic stability

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Staggering hikes as high as 5000% in prices of some prescription drugs threaten the health of Americans who can't afford vital medicines as well as the broader economic stability of households across the U.S., a new congressional report warned Wednesday.

The findings by the Senate Special on Aging summarize the panel's 2016 investigation of records from four pharmaceutical companies and public hearings that focused on sudden price spikes in decades-old medications and the pricing decisions imposed by [drug](#) industry entrepreneur Martin Shkreli and others healthcare industry executives.

Turing Pharmaceuticals and Retrophin (RTRX), two firms once headed by Shkreli, embattled drugmaker Valeant Pharmaceuticals International (VRX) and Rodelis Therapeutics are among companies that dramatically raised prices on some decades-old, off-patent drugs they acquired and controlled through monopoly business models, the report said.

"The skyrocketing prices of [prescription drugs](#) affect every American family, particularly our seniors," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who chairs the committee. "We must work to stop the bad actors who are driving up the prices of drugs that they did nothing to develop ... just because, as one executive essentially said, 'because I can.'"

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., the panel's ranking minority member, criticized what she termed the "predatory" hedge fund model of drug pricing. She called it "immoral for the patients and taxpayers who

ultimately foot the bill—especially for generic drugs that can be made for pennies a dose."

The [pharmaceutical companies](#) and Shkreli did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment on the report, which focused on the impact spiraling drug prices can have on ordinary Americans.

One was Isla Weston, a North Carolina infant who was diagnosed with a life-threatening parasitic infection called toxoplasmosis in May 2015.

Doctors prescribed Daraprim, a drug that has been available since 1953 and is considered the standard treatment for the infection. But Shannon and Joshua Weston, the baby's parents, discovered that Turing Pharmaceuticals raised the per-tablet price of the medication by more than 5000%—from \$13.50 to \$750—shortly after acquiring the drug's rights from another company.

"I was hopeless and depressed at the thought of what would happen to my perfect little girl if I was not able to help her," Shannon Weston said during a March hearing held by the Senate committee. "I looked into any way I could think of to come up with the almost \$360,000 necessary to treat my daughter for a year with a drug that she needed."

The baby ultimately received at least a year's supply of the drug for \$200 a month from the University of North Carolina Medical Center's pharmacy, Weston testified.

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