

Biden calls for lower prices of Ozempic, similar drugs

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US President Joe Biden and Senator Bernie Sanders accused pharma firms Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly of "price gouging"

US President Joe Biden on Tuesday called on pharmaceutical giants Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly to lower prices for diabetes and weight loss

drugs such as Ozempic, saying firms must stop "ripping off the American people."

In an article written with Senator Bernie Sanders, Biden said US patients pay several times more than those in Canada, Germany and Denmark for Novo Nordisk's diabetes drugs Ozempic and Wegovy, which can also be used for weight loss.

A one-month supply of Ozempic in the United States last year was \$936, compared to \$169 in Canada and \$103 in Germany, according to one study.

Eli Lilly was also charging "unconscionably high prices" for Mounjaro, a drug similar to Ozempic.

"Why should people in Burlington, Vermont, pay so much more than people in Copenhagen or Berlin for the same drug?" wrote Biden and Sanders, who chairs the Senate committee on health and education.

Such "price gouging" makes the drugs unaffordable to millions of Americans, they said.

"If the prices of these drugs are not substantially reduced, they have the potential to bankrupt the American health care system," Biden and Sanders wrote. "We will not allow that to happen."

In a statement to AFP, Novo Nordisk said it takes "patient access and affordability very seriously," adding it was "disappointed that a very difficult and complex problem is being oversimplified and mischaracterized for political purposes."

The cost of Ozempic and Wegovy has decreased approximately 40 percent since their launch, it added, while admitting: "Even when we

lower our prices, patients in the United States often don't receive the savings—this is a problem."

Eli Lilly said it offers Mounjaro, marketed to diabetes patients, and Zepbound, sold as a weight loss drug, "for as low as \$25 a month to those eligible for our savings card program."

"Comparing list prices in the United States to other countries ignores patient affordability programs and hundreds of billions of dollars in discounts and fees" paid to intermediaries by pharmaceutical companies "that should lower the costs of medicines for Americans, but unfortunately this system can drive prices higher," Eli Lilly said in a statement to AFP.

High prices for prescription drugs have been a long-standing problem for American patients, and Biden has focused on lowering health care costs as part of his campaign for reelection in November.

The piece in U.S. Today comes days after Biden's weak performance during a televised presidential debate with Republican Donald Trump sparked sharp concern among Democrats.

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