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AARP Maine to the Office of Affordable Health Care 2024 Public Hearing

Greetings, I am Bridget Quinn, Associate State Director of Advocacy and Outreach for AARP Maine. Today I am offering comments to the Office of Affordable Health Care related to concerns and struggles of older Mainers in affording their needed health care.

I represent AARP which is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. On behalf of our nearly 200,000 members statewide, thank you for the opportunity to share remarks today.

The following principles guide AARP's efforts to promote and sustain individual and population health and improve the health care system by ensuring access to equitable, high-quality, affordable care. Health care policies must

- Engage individuals and communities to support healthy living
- Ensure adequacy and affordability
- Deliver high-quality care and contain costs
- Ensure access and equity

A 2022 survey done by AARP nationally found that the cost of health care poses challenges to many midlife and older adults, especially those ages 40–49. Three in 10 (31%) adults ages 40–64 have opted to skip taking a medication due to cost, with a similar percentage (29%) reporting that they have experienced an adverse event due to the cost of health care. Adults ages 40–49 are more likely than those 60–64 to say they had to borrow money from family or friends to help pay for their medical expenses (8% vs. 2%), and adults younger than 60 are more likely to report receiving an unexpected medical bill (33%, 40–49; 29%, 50–59 vs. 22%, 60-plus).¹

¹ Health Care Affordability Among Adults Ages 40–64, fielded May 24–June 9, 2022. Keenan, Teresa A. *Health Care Affordability Among Adults Ages 40–64*. Washington, DC: AARP Research, November 2022. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00578.001>

Further, when asked at what price an individual health insurance premium would become unaffordable, one-fifth (19%) of adults ages 40–64 said at \$50 a month it would become unaffordable.²

Adults ages 40–64 have varying levels of confidence in their ability to pay an unexpected \$1,000 medical bill within 30 days. Four in 10 (40%) report that they are extremely or very confident they could pay the bill and another four in 10 (38%) say they are not very or not at all confident that they could.³

Concerns about adequately affording health care is also found among Mainers ages 45 and older. An AARP survey conducted in July found that among Mainers 45 and older, 57% feel that having adequate health insurance coverage is extremely important. Further, 50% of respondents felt that being able to pay for prescription drugs is extremely important and 54% felt that it was extremely important to be able to afford health care expenses including premiums and co-pays.

When it comes to affording prescription drugs older adults have concerns. AARP's Rx Price Watch report shows that retail prices for 943 commonly used drugs increased faster than the rate of general inflation every year from 2006 until 2020, the most recent year data is available. For example drugs with price increases in 2020 included Nerlynx used for early stage breast cancer had a 20.8% price hike. Ativan used to treat anxiety and depression had a 9.2% price hike, Tymlos for osteoporosis had a 7.9% price hike. All greatly outpaces that years 1.3% rate of inflation.

Long term care is also of concerns to Mainers. The 2024 survey of Mainers 45+ found that 82% would prefer to receive care or help at home with the assistance of a caregiver. Further, when asked respondents reported that 46% say it is extremely important to have services so people can be cared for in their homes as they age, 40% say it is extremely important to have alternatives to nursing home care. The majority of respondents (86%) have some level of concern about being able to afford long term care, either in an institutional setting or through home and community bases services.

Maine's older adults have a broad range of concerns regarding access to affordable and quality health services. Thank you for the opportunity to share remarks today. If you should like any more information please contact me at bquinn@aarp.org.

Thank you,
Bridget Quinn

² Health Care Affordability Among Adults Ages 40–64, fielded May 24–June 9, 2022. Keenan, Teresa A. *Health Care Affordability Among Adults Ages 40–64*. Washington, DC: AARP Research, November 2022. <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00578.001>

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