

# Let's Talk about Rx Costs

Did you know that prescription price increases are now the main driver of health care premium increases?

Prescription drug costs make up **20 percent** of every premium dollar, regardless of how you fill your prescriptions. This leads us to find ways to control these costs as best we can. There are some simple ways for patients to save.

VEHI prepared this resource to help you and your school understand how prescription prices impact premiums and to recommend ways to reduce your pharmacy costs, while also lowering costs for everyone.



## 7 WAYS TO SAVE ON PRESCRIPTIONS

**Ask your doctor to review your Rx needs.** A 2017 Consumer Report survey found that 70 percent of people who audit medications with their doctor were able to eliminate at least one.

**Make it a habit to discuss cost.** If your doctor doesn't talk regularly about drug costs, start the conversation. Medications that treat the same condition can vary greatly in costs.

**Go generic.** Always ask your doctor or pharmacist if a generic is available and indicated. It is likely cheaper for you and can save VEHI a lot of money: a one-percent shift in favor of generics can reduce our costs between \$500,000 and \$750,000 yearly.

**Order a 90-day supply if possible.** You may also save money by ordering up to a 90-day supply for medications that treat chronic conditions or that you take on a long-term basis. You have 2 options available for ordering a 90-day supply. You can either purchase a 90-day supply at your retail pharmacy, or you can use mail order, which allows for medications to be delivered right to your home. The potential savings for you (and VEHI), as well as the added convenience of fewer trips to the pharmacy, make the change to a 90-day supply well worth it.

**Compare prices.** Take advantage of this [cost transparency tool](#) to learn what different pharmacies in Vermont charge for your medications.

**Discuss your dosage.** One pill of a 50mg strength medication, for example, can cost less than taking two pills of the 25mg strength. Ask your doctor or pharmacist whether you can take fewer pills at a stronger dose.

**Explore financial assistance options.** Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) are run by drug companies, providing free or low-cost medications. [RXAssist.org](#) is a comprehensive online resource center and database that can help you research PAPs. VEHI also put together a list of [cost-sharing assistance](#) options for some of the most common medications.



HealthNAVIGATION

# Specialty, Brand & Generic Prescriptions

– What are the differences?

## DID YOU KNOW THAT PRESCRIPTIONS HAVE DIFFERENT CLASSIFICATIONS?

Doctors prescribe different medications for a variety of conditions, rare and common, acute, and chronic. They are all effective but vary greatly in costs and utilization rates. Your medications fall generally into three classifications: specialty, brand name, and generic.

VEHI prepared this resource to help you and your school understand the basics of drug classifications and their utilization and cost dynamics. Drug classifications, costs and utilization impact premiums, so we want you to be informed about how you can reduce your pharmacy costs, while also lowering costs for everyone.

### **Specialty Medicines** Average gross cost: **\$5,100/month.**

Specialty drugs require special handling, preparation, and careful oversight. Just **2 percent** of VEHI members are prescribed these life-saving medications, but because of their incredibly high costs, they account for **51 percent** of VEHI's total pharmacy spend. With all medications, but especially where specialty prescriptions are concerned, taking them as prescribed by your doctor is very important to protect your health.

### **Brand Name Drugs** Average gross cost: **\$355/month.**

Brand name drugs are **medications that have patent protection**, meaning only the company holding the patent has the legal right to manufacture the drug. These drugs are much cheaper than specialty medicines, yet, typically, they are more expensive than generic drugs. They make up roughly **12 percent** of VEHI's total pharmacy spend.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUR PRESCRIPTION MEDICATIONS

Review VEHI's [formulary](#) for the list of brand name drugs, which may be available at a lower cost through a PAP. Also review preferred brand name drugs that now have in a [generic](#) equivalent. Share these lists with your doctor or pharmacist when discussing your prescriptions.

Visit VEHI's [Rx Center](#), which offers helpful prescription resources.

Price a drug before you go to the pharmacy by logging on to Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont's [Member Resource Center](#).

### **Generic Drugs** Average gross cost: **\$23/month.**

Generic drugs are much less expensive and contain the exact same active ingredients, in the exact same amounts as their brand name counterpart and are identical in terms of their quality and meet the same government standards for potency. **86 percent** of VEHI prescriptions are for generics, but, in total, they account for just **20 percent** of VEHI's total pharmacy spend.

## WELLNESS MEDICATIONS

In all three categories above, there are medications to treat chronic conditions like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, osteoporosis, and diabetes. VEHI makes these "wellness drugs" (and testing supplies for diabetes, when obtained through your prescription drug benefit) available at zero cost-share to active employees enrolled in the Gold CDHP and Silver CDHP. Click [here](#) to learn about VEHI's wellness drug benefit for the Gold CDHP and Silver CDHP.

Diabetic medications and testing supplies also come with zero cost-share for active employees in non-CDHP plans (Platinum and Gold) and to retired subscribers in VEHI plans offered by VSTRS. Click [here](#) to learn about VEHI's benefits for diabetes.

