

October 5, 2006

Dear Senator:

As millions of seniors and disabled fall into the Medicare Part D “donut hole” coverage gap in coming weeks, *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* recommends that you advise constituents to talk to their doctor about switching to cost-effective medications that will dramatically cut their out-of-pocket costs for prescriptions.

Many seniors and disabled are now finding they have to pay the full cost of their prescriptions due to the Medicare coverage gap, which is a very scary proposition for those on fixed incomes.

As Members of Congress, you interact with thousands of constituents each day. You can help by encouraging them to talk to their doctors about switching to low-cost, effective drugs so they don't have to choose between their needed medications and basic necessities.

*Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* identifies cost-effective medications that can save Medicare beneficiaries thousands of dollars a year over high-priced, brand-name prescription drugs. The FREE web site, [www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org](http://www.CRBestBuyDrugs.org), cuts through drug industry marketing hype and offers independent analysis of prescription drugs based on effectiveness, safety and price.

The savings can be dramatic. For example, if a beneficiary was taking five prescription drugs for cholesterol, high blood pressure, arthritis pain, heart disease and depression, the potential savings from switching from a brand-name to a *Best Buy* drug, would be more than \$400 a month or \$5,184 per year (see chart below).

Many Americans don't realize there are safe and effective alternatives to the high-priced prescriptions they are being prescribed. Medicare beneficiaries especially need to know they have options that can save them significant amounts of money.

It is estimated that between 3.4 million and 6.9 million Medicare beneficiaries will hit the coverage gap this year. The ‘donut hole’ kicks in under most standard Medicare plans after Medicare and a beneficiary spend a total of \$2,250 on medicines. Coverage is resumed only after the beneficiary pays another \$2,850 out of their own pocket.

Below is a chart showing the potential savings under the Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs Program

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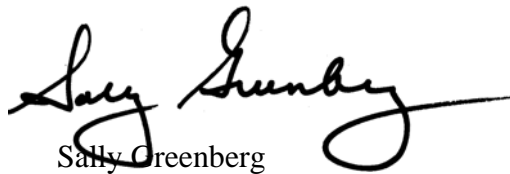
**Potential Savings of Switching to *Consumer Reports*  
Best Buy Drugs without Medicare Part D Coverage**

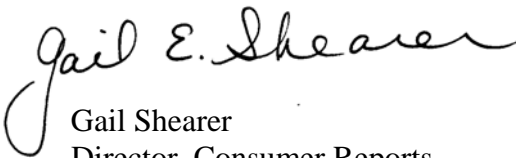
<b>Best Buy Drugs</b>	<b>Monthly cost<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Alternative Drugs</b>	<b>Monthly Cost</b>	<b>Potential Monthly Savings</b>	<b>Potential Annual Savings</b>
<b>Cholesterol</b> Lovastatin 20 mg. (30 tablets)	\$23	Lipitor 20 mg. (30 tablets)	\$104	\$81	\$972
<b>Blood Pressure</b> Lisinopril 20 mg (30 tablets)	\$11	Altace 2.5 mg (30 capsules)	\$40	\$29	\$348
<b>Arthritis Pain</b> Ibuprofen 400 mg 3 x day	\$9	Celebrex 200 mg 2x day (60 capsules) 2 x 100	\$200	\$191	\$2,292
<b>Antidepressant</b> Fluoxetine HCL 20 mg (30 tablets)	\$16	Zoloft 25 mg. (30 tablets)	\$82	\$66	\$792
<b>Heart Disease</b> Diltiazem HCL CR 60 mg, 2 x day	\$33	Procardia XL 30 mg, 2 x day	\$98	\$65	\$780
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>\$432</b>	<b>\$5,184</b>

<sup>1</sup> These prices were obtained from [www.drugstore.com](http://www.drugstore.com) on Sept. 18, 2006. Note that some adjustments were made to get a comparable number of pills per prescription on the drugstore.com website.

If you have questions about the Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs Program, don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

  
Sally Greenberg  
Senior Product Safety Counsel  
Consumers Union Washington Office

  
Gail Shearer  
Director, Consumer Reports  
Best Buy Drugs