

Prices

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for a year could be a \$2,000 mistake.

The cost of a month's supply of four common prescriptions — Prilosec, Zocor, Norvasc and Claritin — ranged from a low of \$309.78 at Aurora's Costco Wholesale Pharmacy to a high of \$472.65 at Pueblo's Mesa Pharmacy.

"I was flabbergasted by the differences," said Jon Caldara, president of the Independence Institute.

The survey included 10 Fort Collins pharmacies where prices ranged from \$321.86 at Shopko Pharmacy, 135 Bockman Drive, to \$414.76 at Rite Aid, 1103 W. Prospect Road.

Caldara said the drugs in the survey were selected because they don't have a generic equivalent. That means all the pharmacies must order each of the drugs from a single manufacturer.

"A lot of the mom-and-pops and independents did pretty well in this survey," Caldara said. "A real chain store villain is Rite Aid, which was the second most expensive overall."

In Littleton, a shopper at Rite Aid could save \$83.80 on the survey's monthly Rx cost by walking less than 300 feet to the neighboring pharmacy at King Soopers.

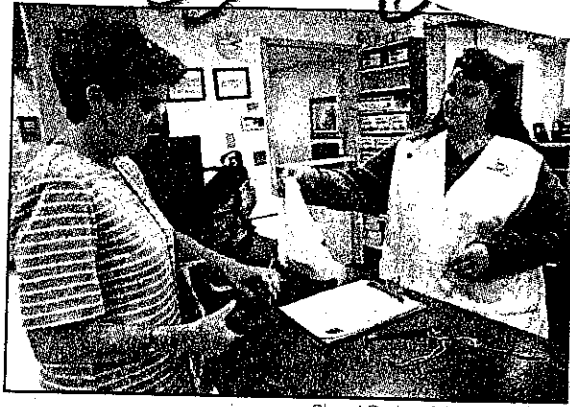
"This information has been very valuable to us," Pennsylvania-based Rite Aid spokeswoman Sarah Datz said. "I don't know what the pricing policy has been in the past, but we're looking into how we determine cash pricing."

"Very few (prescriptions) are paid for by cash (without insurance), over 90 percent are covered by (some kind of) insurance. This survey represents a small percentage of our business."

But Rite Aid's local manager, Ramona Lokamas, said about 20 percent of the Fort Collins customers are cash payers.

The survey results were no surprise to Fort Collins resident June Tucker, who learned the value of shopping around from her mother.

Before her mother, Maybelle Tucker, died in 1996, she was living on a fixed monthly income of \$948 while her monthly prescription costs were more than



Sherry Barber/The Coloradoan

SERVICE WITH A SMILE: Sherry Kubiak, pharmacy technician at Shopko, hands Ellen Willging, left, her prescription at the Fort Collins store Monday.

Colo. survey finds it pays to shop for prescription prices

By **SALLY BRIDGES**
The Coloradoan

As George W. Bush and Al Gore try to sell voters on their prescription drug plans, local researchers are warning seniors not to buy it.

Their message is simple: If you want to save money on your prescription costs in Fort Collins and elsewhere along the Front Range, you better shop around.

Last week, the Independence Institute, a

nonprofit think tank in Golden, released a price survey of 100 Colorado pharmacies. The surveyed pharmacies included the big chains as well as the small mom-and-pops.

The survey revealed that filling your prescription at the wrong store

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Compare prices at **selected stores**/A2

FORT COLLINS
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Prescription Drug Cost Comparisons

Last week the Independence Institute released a prescription cost survey of 100 Colorado pharmacies. The survey included 10 Fort Collins pharmacies. City Drug declined to participate in the survey. Of the additional pharmacies contacted by the *Coloradoan* — Longs Drug, Walgreen and Safeway — only Safeway agreed to participate.

Drug Descriptions
Prilosec: For heartburn
Zocor: For high cholesterol
Norvasc: For high blood pressure
Claritin: For allergies

Prescription	Spring Creek Pharmacy 2001 S. Shields St.	Albertsons Food and Drug 3660 S. Mason St.	Steele's Pharmacy 1024 Lemay Ave. (At P.V.H.)	Rite Aid 1108 W. Prospect Road	Wal-Mart 4825 S. Mason St.	Target 105 Troutman Parkway	Shopko Pharmacy 135 Bookman Drive	Butler's Lemay Pharmacy 1009 S. Lemay Ave.	Toddy's 2501 S. Lemay Ave.	Safeway 2160 W. Drake Road
Prilosec	\$124.18	\$126.69	\$129.80	\$148.69	\$105.98	\$106.99	\$111.39	\$111.69	\$113.87	\$118.99
Zocor	\$119.29	\$112.69	\$119.72	\$129.69	\$112.98	\$112.99	\$107.79	\$110.87	\$99.09	\$105.49
Norvasc	\$40.95	\$41.99	\$44.88	\$53.69	\$43.72	\$41.69	\$40.19	\$40.36	\$45.95	\$47.49
Claritin	\$69.34	\$70.69	\$76.57	\$82.89	\$59.98	\$73.39	\$62.49	\$65.89	\$72.24	\$71.49
Totals	\$353.76	\$352.06	\$370.97	\$414.76	\$322.66	\$335.06	\$321.86	\$328.81	\$331.15	\$343.46

Independence Institute Coloradoan research

Kirk Alberts/The Coloradoan

High Rx prices can be minimized

By **SALLY BRIDGES**
 The Coloradoan

It's not uncommon for Fort Collins residents to leave unfilled a prescription they can't afford, Poudre Health Services District spokesman Richard Cox said.

A 1998 Health District survey revealed 8 percent of residents either delayed or were unable to fill their prescriptions because of the high costs.

To fight this problem, the health district offers a prescription drug program for qualifying low-income residents to help them receive their prescriptions at low or even no cost.

Last year, the district expanded the program by merging with Poudre Valley Hospital and serving 1,048 individuals and providing \$416,000 worth of free medications.

The health district will help individuals apply for assistance programs offered by the drug companies. The companies often offer limited supplies of discounted or free medications. The process is often complicated, Cox said. The health district recommends these tips for saving money:

- Shop around to find the best price.
- When possible, use gener-

ic drugs that usually cost about 30 percent less than their name brand counterparts.

■ Ask your doctor for free samples of new prescribed medication.

■ Split tablets; higher dose tablets are often cheaper. Tablets can be divided in half by cutting where the tablet is scored.

■ Use mail-order pharmacies.

■ Enroll in drug company assistance programs.

For more information, Cox suggested these online sites: www.needymeds.com and www.rxassist.org.

\$700 a month.

Tucker, a member of the city's Senior Advisory Board, which reports to the City Council, conducted a similar survey of Fort Collins pharmacies comparing five different drugs about three months ago.

"We were specifically looking at people on Medicare and living on a limited, fixed income," Tucker said. "Because of these high costs they suffer dearly. We have seniors who can't afford their prescriptions and have to do without. It's not a pretty picture."

She discovered seniors could save money by checking prescription costs at other pharmacies. And on prescriptions for chronic conditions, mail-order company prices can be 45 percent less expensive, she said.

She cited a 1999 report from Families USA that said the cost of prescription drugs have risen four times faster than the inflation rate.

"It's bigger than me," she said. "There are pharmacy bills down the road (that may help), but let's publicize this now, so people have the opportunity to buy drugs cheaper."

Many seniors are reluctant to change pharmacies, she said. But most pharmacies will honor

'We were specifically looking at people on Medicare and living on a limited, fixed income. . . . We have seniors who can't afford their prescriptions and have to do without. It's not a pretty picture.'

June Tucker,
 Senior Advisory Board

tell their pharmacy another store's price for the same prescription to see if they will honor it, Tucker said.

Vicki Einhellig, owner of Spring Creek and Doug's pharmacies, said there was more to selecting a pharmacy than just price. Spring Creek was included in the survey with a monthly cost of \$353.76.

"We weren't the lowest and not the highest. We were pretty much where we wanted to be," Einhellig said. "These prices don't reflect the prices of our other prescriptions or our service."

at a number of different pharmacies to save money, they could be risking their lives because the pharmacists will be unable to catch potential drug interaction problems.

According to the American Pharmaceutical Association, 25 percent of hospital admissions for the elderly are from medication-related problems such as inappropriate dosing or drug interactions, costing an estimated \$120 billion each year, she said.

"Drug companies are coming out with new drugs faster and that leads to higher drug costs," Einhellig said. "It's really the drug companies that set the costs, not the pharmacies."

Shopko pharmacist Paul Athey agreed with Einhellig.

"Price is just one aspect of a total pharmacy," Athey said. "If total service is not there, prices are very similar."

Generic drugs can help consumers save money, he said. But the savings aren't always that significant and most pharmacies carry only one generic of several possible generics for a single name-brand drug.

There is no quick fix to the prescription price woes, Caldara said Monday. It may take years before politicians can implement a prescription drug reform

Chart shows results of an Independence Institute survey of prescription prices charged by 100 Colorado pharmacies for a one-month supply of four widely prescribed drugs:

Clarithin, an allergy medicine
Norvasc, blood-pressure drug
Prilosec, heartburn prescription
Zocor, cholesterol medicine

Pharmacy	Prilosec	Zocor	Norvasc	Clarithin	Total	Pharmacy	Prilosec	Zocor	Norvasc	Clarithin	Total
Carl's Pharmacy, Aspen	\$122.95	\$122.75	\$48.25	\$75.25	\$369.20	Rite Aid, Durango	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Tom's Clinic Pharmacy, Aspen	\$129.20	\$124.30	\$45.95	\$74.35	\$373.80	Estes Park Pharmacy, Estes Park	\$115.00	\$109.30	\$43.80	\$70.95	\$339.05
Aspen Drug, Aspen	\$129.50	\$124.95	\$60.95	\$77.90	\$383.30	Wal-Mart, Fort Collins	\$106.54	\$112.98	\$43.72	\$59.98	\$323.22
Costco Wholesale Pharmacy, Aurora	\$108.97	\$102.47	\$36.87	\$61.47	\$309.78	Target, Fort Collins	\$106.99	\$112.99	\$41.69	\$70.99	\$332.66
Family Pharmacy, Aurora	\$113.72	\$114.79	\$36.65	\$64.97	\$330.13	Shopko, Fort Collins	\$111.39	\$107.79	\$40.19	\$62.49	\$321.86
Albertsons, Smoky Hill Rd., Aurora	\$124.89	\$115.89	\$45.89	\$69.89	\$356.56	Butler's Lemay Pharmacy, Fort Collins	\$111.69	\$110.87	\$40.36	\$65.89	\$328.81
Rite Aid, Boulder	\$116.71	\$112.31	\$41.80	\$67.36	\$338.18	Today's, Fort Collins	\$113.87	\$99.09	\$45.95	\$72.24	\$331.15
Safeway, Boulder	\$118.99	\$105.49	\$47.49	\$69.49	\$341.46	Spring Creek Pharmacy, Fort Collins	\$124.18	\$119.29	\$40.95	\$69.34	\$353.76
Boulder Medical Center Pharmacy	\$126.18	\$121.30	\$45.70	\$73.33	\$366.51	Albertsons, Fort Collins	\$126.69	\$112.69	\$41.99	\$70.69	\$352.06
30th Street Market, Boulder	\$126.69	\$112.69	\$41.99	\$70.69	\$352.06	Steele's Pharmacy, Fort Collins	\$129.80	\$119.72	\$44.88	\$76.57	\$370.97
Ludwig Pharmacy, Boulder	\$129.12	\$124.24	\$45.90	\$73.60	\$372.86	Rite Aid, Fort Collins	\$148.69	\$129.69	\$53.69	\$82.69	\$414.76
Jones Drug, Boulder	\$130.68	\$129.79	\$46.45	\$75.33	\$382.25	City Drug Store, Fort Collins	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Goose Creek Pharmacy, Boulder	\$132.45	\$127.55	\$43.60	\$76.05	\$379.65	Granby Drug Store, Granby	\$124.18	\$131.00	\$47.70	\$69.34	\$372.22
Alpine Pharmacy, Boulder	\$132.45	\$127.55	\$46.90	\$76.05	\$382.95	Wal-Mart, Grand Junction	\$101.54	\$116.97	\$43.98	\$61.54	\$324.03
Broadway Drug, Boulder	\$141.59	\$136.29	\$52.19	\$81.29	\$411.36	Orchard Pharmacy, Grand Junction	\$106.89	\$111.19	\$44.09	\$66.19	\$328.36
Rite Aid, Boulder	\$148.69	\$129.69	\$53.69	\$82.69	\$414.76	City Market, Grand Junction	\$108.82	\$117.18	\$45.40	\$69.91	\$341.31
Palace Drug, Canon City	\$118.00	\$115.00	\$40.05	\$71.20	\$344.25	Walker Drug, Grand Junction	\$117.05	\$115.75	\$45.75	\$70.05	\$348.60
Safeway, Wilcox St., Castle Rock	\$118.99	\$105.49	\$47.49	\$69.49	\$341.46	Rite Aid, Grand Junction	\$148.69	\$129.69	\$53.69	\$82.69	\$414.76
+ Executive Park Pharm., Colo. Springs	\$110.74	\$108.00	\$38.00	\$69.00	\$325.74	King Soopers, Greeley	\$111.59	\$105.59	\$44.69	\$69.09	\$330.96
King Soopers, Uintah St., Colo. Springs	\$111.59	\$105.59	\$44.69	\$69.09	\$330.96	Kmart, Greeley	\$115.99	\$108.59	\$45.59	\$69.99	\$341.16
Eastside Pharmacy, Colo. Springs	\$115.99	\$112.30	\$41.90	\$71.33	\$341.52	Safeway, Greeley	\$118.99	\$105.49	\$47.49	\$69.49	\$341.46
Village Pharmacy, Colo. Springs	\$116.90	\$106.98	\$38.90	\$66.90	\$329.68	Clinic Pharmacy, Greeley	\$119.20	\$115.71	\$49.27	\$72.03	\$356.21
Kmart, Nevada Ave., Colo. Springs	\$117.59	\$116.99	\$47.99	\$73.59	\$356.16	Today's, Greeley	\$120.00	\$117.31	\$43.77	\$71.28	\$352.36
Waggreens, Uintah St., Colo. Springs	\$119.99	\$112.99	\$46.99	\$72.99	\$352.96	Wal-Mart, Greeley	\$126.00	\$115.00	\$45.00	\$71.00	\$357.00
Wal-Mart, Platte Ave., Colo. Springs	\$123.78	\$112.98	\$43.72	\$69.78	\$350.26	Albertsons, Greeley	\$126.69	\$112.69	\$41.99	\$70.69	\$352.06
Medicine Shoppee, Colo. Springs	\$124.74	\$124.10	\$41.58	\$69.30	\$359.72	Rite Aid, Greeley	\$148.62	\$129.69	\$53.69	\$82.69	\$414.69
Hywild Pharmacy, Colo. Springs	\$136.60	\$131.22	\$44.15	\$76.27	\$388.24	King Soopers, Littleton	\$111.59	\$105.59	\$44.69	\$69.09	\$330.96
College Pharmacy, Colo. Springs	\$139.18	\$129.16	\$43.70	\$75.30	\$387.34	Wise Pharmacy, Littleton	\$111.76	\$135.00	\$47.70	\$76.59	\$371.05
Goldin Pharmacy, Denver	\$111.00	\$103.00	\$40.00	\$66.00	\$320.00	Apothecary Pharmacy, Littleton	\$114.25	\$109.86	\$39.36	\$64.91	\$328.38
King Soopers, Colorado Blvd., Denver	\$111.59	\$105.59	\$44.69	\$69.09	\$330.96	Rite Aid, Littleton	\$148.69	\$129.69	\$53.69	\$82.69	\$414.76
Todds Pharmacy, Denver	\$118.00	\$111.00	\$45.00	\$75.00	\$349.00	Palisade Pharmacy, Palisade	\$111.89	\$103.89	\$37.49	\$62.89	\$316.16
Colorado Pharmacy, Denver	\$118.74	\$105.67	\$36.87	\$67.78	\$329.06	King Soopers Northern Ave., Pueblo	\$111.59	\$105.59	\$44.69	\$69.09	\$330.96
Safeway, 26th and Federal, Denver	\$118.99	\$105.49	\$47.49	\$69.49	\$341.46	County Pharmacy, Pueblo	\$111.89	\$115.89	\$46.89	\$74.89	\$349.56
Brentwood Pharmacy, Denver	\$119.00	\$105.20	\$41.85	\$67.95	\$334.00	Blonde Drug Inc., Pueblo	\$113.19	\$116.19	\$41.39	\$66.79	\$337.56
Waggreens, Colfax Ave., Denver	\$119.99	\$112.99	\$46.99	\$72.99	\$352.96	Albertsons, Pueblo	\$124.89	\$115.89	\$41.89	\$69.89	\$352.56
Capitol Heights Pharmacy, Denver	\$123.57	\$123.30	\$43.72	\$73.34	\$363.93	JB Pharmacy, Pueblo	\$124.95	\$166.75	\$41.50	\$67.25	\$400.45
Albertsons, S. Sheridan Blvd., Denver	\$126.69	\$112.69	\$41.99	\$70.69	\$352.06	Wal-Mart, Pueblo	\$125.84	\$114.98	\$44.54	\$70.92	\$356.28
Econo Drug Store, Denver	\$129.00	\$122.00	\$40.00	\$73.00	\$374.00	Medical Arts Pharmacy, Pueblo	\$129.58	\$112.12	\$40.87	\$74.09	\$356.66
Medicine Shoppee, Denver	\$131.13	\$125.25	\$46.90	\$76.29	\$380.57	Broadway Pharmacy, Pueblo	\$129.75	\$124.85	\$46.45	\$74.85	\$375.90
Rite Aid, E. Colfax Ave., Denver	\$148.69	\$129.69	\$53.69	\$82.69	\$414.76	Belmont Pharmacy, Pueblo	\$130.85	\$125.95	\$47.00	\$75.60	\$379.40
Rite Aid, W. 38th Ave., Denver	\$148.69	\$129.69	\$53.69	\$82.69	\$414.76	Mesa Pharmacy, Pueblo	\$155.25	\$149.15	\$81.55	\$86.70	\$472.65
Rite Aid, S. Colorado Blvd., Denver	\$148.69	\$129.69	\$53.69	\$82.69	\$414.76	Ben Rex Pharmacy, Rifle	\$127.18	\$124.30	\$45.95	\$74.34	\$371.77
Denver Drug, Denver	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Bigg's Pharmacy, Thornton	\$111.69	\$110.99	\$43.99	\$69.39	\$336.06
Sunnyside Drug Co., Denver	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Wal-Mart, Thornton	\$123.78	\$112.98	\$43.72	\$69.78	\$350.26
Unicare Pharm., Denver	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Rite Aid	\$124.18	\$121.29	\$44.95	\$69.33	\$359.75
Cornell Pharm., Denver	\$128.00	\$123.00	\$45.00	\$74.00	\$370.00	City Market, Vail	\$111.65	\$117.18	\$51.06	\$72.31	\$352.20
City Market, Durango	\$110.32	\$117.18	\$50.06	\$71.51	\$349.07	Eagle Valley Pharmacy, Vail	\$111.65	\$117.18	\$51.06	\$72.31	\$352.20
Wal-Mart, Durango	\$110.98	\$112.98	\$38.98	\$68.98	\$331.92	Costco Wholesale Pharm., Westminster	\$108.27	\$102.47	\$37.67	\$74.29	\$322.70
Kmart, Durango	\$111.59	\$105.99	\$39.97	\$68.59	\$326.14	Safeway, Federal & 84th, Westminster	\$118.99	\$105.49	\$47.49	\$69.49	\$341.46
Albertsons, Durango	\$124.89	\$115.89	\$45.89	\$69.89	\$356.56	Wal-Mart, 120th Ave., Westminster	\$126.69	\$112.69	\$41.99	\$70.69	\$352.06

N/A — Not available; refused to respond to survey