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Pricey drugs overwhelm Medicare safeguard

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A safeguard for Medicare beneficiaries has become a way for drugmakers to get paid billions of dollars for pricey medications at taxpayer expense, government numbers show.

The cost of Medicare's "catastrophic" prescription coverage jumped by 85 percent in three years, from \$27.7 billion in 2013 to \$51.3 billion in 2015, according to the program's number-crunching Office of the Actuary.

Out of some 2,750 drugs covered by Medicare's Part D benefit, two pills for hepatitis C infection — Harvoni and Sovaldi — accounted for nearly \$7.5 billion in catastrophic drug costs in 2015.

The pharmaceutical industry questions the numbers, saying they overstate costs because they don't factor in manufacturer rebates. However, rebates are not publicly disclosed. Sen. Charles

Grassley, R-Iowa, is calling the rise in spending "alarming."

Medicare's catastrophic coverage was originally designed to protect seniors with multiple chronic conditions from the cumulatively high costs of taking many different pills. Beneficiaries pay 5 percent after they have spent \$4,850 of their own money. With some drugs now costing more than \$1,000 per pill, that threshold can be crossed quickly.

Lawmakers who created Part D in 2003 also hoped added protection would entice insurers to participate in the program. Medicare pays 80 percent of the cost of drugs above a catastrophic threshold that combines spending by the beneficiary and the insurer. That means taxpayers, not insurers, bear the exposure for the most expensive patients.

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The Associated Press file (2011)

Various prescription drugs on the automated pharmacy assembly line at Medco Health Solutions in Willingboro, N.J.



Susan Hiland/Daily Republic

Children and parents enjoy a weekend of fishing activities for Kid's Day of Fishing at Lake Solano Park, Sunday.

Kids Day of Fishing returns to Lake Solano for summer camping

SUSAN HILAND
DAILY REPUBLIC

The heat didn't bother the children at Lake Solano Park on Sunday: They were having too much fun to notice.

Kids Day of Fishing at Lake Solano was the first fishing trip for Ana Mah, 19, of Suisun City, but it was 24 hours she will never forget.

Most of her family came out to join the young woman, who has Down syndrome, for a family day.

"I liked using the binoculars," she said.

Mah showed off the necklace

she made Saturday with soft soapstone, and a bracelet of black-and-white beads.

Her mother couldn't have been happier because she said it's hard for her daughter to focus for a length of time.

"She just doesn't do crafts," Elizabeth Mah said. "When we came back from being on the water, she said that this was the most fun she had in her whole life."

Ana Mah wore the beads for several hours, also a first for her. She usually never wears jewelry.

Kids Day of Fishing at Lake Solano, in its ninth year, brought 30 youth out for a weekend of camping, fishing, hiking, crafts

and learning.

The nonprofit organization raises about \$20,000 each year and, with the help of the Kiwanis Club of Greater Napa, puts on summer fishing events to help encourage children to get out and enjoy themselves.

"It is a two-day educational event for kids," said Mike Johns, founder and president of Kids Day of Fishing Inc. "They will learn about ecology, camping and fishing."

A parent brought vegetables from the family's organic garden, and Grace Hindes chopped them

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Personality change could be early sign of dementia, experts say

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Memory loss may not always be the first warning sign that dementia is brewing — changes in behavior or personality might be an early clue.

Researchers on Sunday outlined a syndrome called "mild behavioral impairment" that may be

a harbinger of Alzheimer's or other dementias, and proposed a checklist of symptoms to alert doctors and families.

Losing interest in favorite activities? Getting unusually anxious, aggressive or suspicious? Suddenly making crude comments in public?

"Historically those symptoms have been

written off as a psychiatric issue, or as just part of aging," said Dr. Zahinoor Ismail of the University of Calgary, who presented the checklist at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference in Toronto.

Now, "when it comes to early detection, memory symptoms don't have the corner on the market

anymore," he said.

Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia, affects more than 5 million people in the U.S., a number growing as the population ages. It gradually strips people of their memory and the ability to think and reason.

But it creeps up, quietly

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Dems bedeviled anew by email on convention's eve



The Associated Press

Gary Gort, a set carpenter with CNN, adjusts a sign during preparations before the 2016 Democratic Convention in Philadelphia, Sunday.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — On the heels of a tumultuous Republican convention, Hillary Clinton arrives in Philadelphia eager to show off a forward-looking Democratic Party united behind her steady leadership. To do that, she must overcome lingering bitterness among supporters of defeated rival Bernie Sanders and clean up a resurgent political mess of the party's own making.

The resignation of

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Clinton highlights lack of women in office. Page A5.

ON DAILYREPUBLIC.COM

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- Trump vs. Clinton: Is a 2017 'peaceful transfer' possible?

Debbie Wasserman Schultz as chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee made for a rocky start on Sunday, as the Florida congresswoman heeded Sanders' longstanding call to leave as party chief. Her

departure comes a few days after the publication of 19,000 hacked emails, which Sanders said confirmed his belief the national party played favorites for Clinton during the primary.

"The party now needs new leadership that will open the doors of the party and welcome in working people and young people," Sanders said.

Wasserman Schultz's abrupt departure was undoubtedly an effort to keep the Democrats' gathering from devolving into the tumult that marred last week's GOP meeting, when runner-up Ted Cruz pointedly and publicly refused to endorse nominee Donald Trump. As he demanded

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