



## Benita Lee

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**D**espite outrage over the high cost of insulin, prices for popular insulins have continued to climb in 2019, according to a GoodRx analysis. Though prices are not climbing as quickly as they did between 2002 and 2014, the average cost of insulin therapy nearly [tripled](#)—the average price\* increased by 55% since the first quarter of 2014.

The analysis also shows that price increases this year affected a select group of insulin brands, those that control blood sugar throughout the day, and Afrezza, the inhaled, ultra-rapid-acting insulin made by MannKind.

The average retail price for Afrezza has gone up by 8% since the fourth quarter of last year. Prices for long-acting insulins made by Sanofi-Aventis and Novo Nordisk increased by a similar amount over the same period, calling into question the pledges these manufacturers made to help reduce costs. In 2017, Sanofi-Aventis had [vowed](#) to limit annual price increases to a rate below medical inflation (5.4%). And Novo Nordisk [promised](#) just months before to cap annual price increases to 5%.



\*average price is weighted based on the insulin units filled on a prescription claim

## GoodRx

The analysis on 23 insulins across manufacturers and insulin types—short-, intermediate- and long-acting—shows that manufacturers are still raising insulin prices, and costs now vary by a lot depending on which insulin you take. Here, we'll walk you through how each insulin stacks up so you can get the best deal on these life-saving medications.

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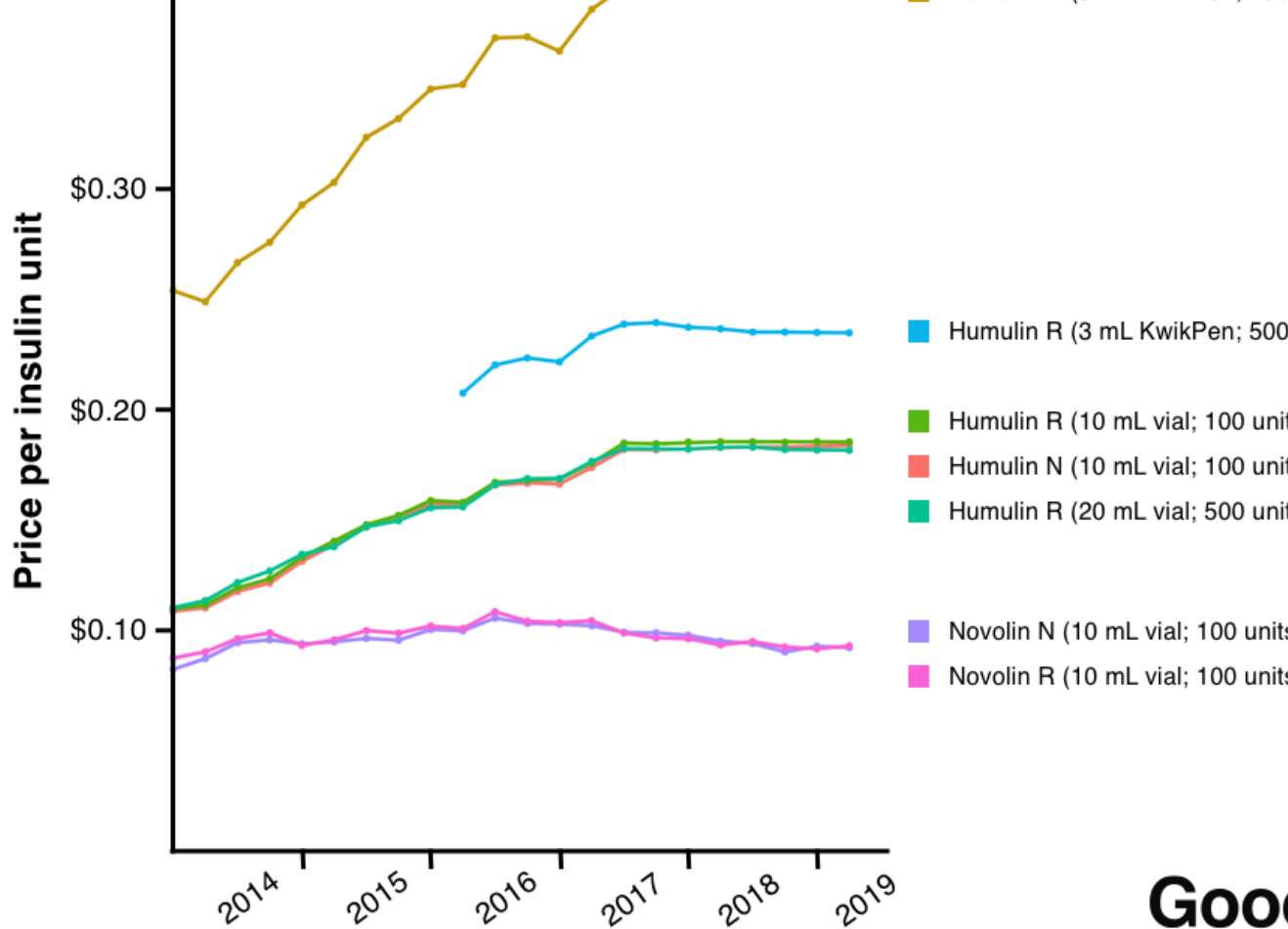
*This GoodRx analysis is based on a representative sample of U.S. prescription fills (not all of which comes from several sources, including pharmacies and insurers. The reported prices per unit are based on cash prices, the so-called "usual and customary" prices or retail prices at the pharmacy, not on insurance copays or co-insurance).*

*A note about insulin use:*

*One insulin unit can be defined as the amount of insulin it takes to [lower blood glucose](#). However, each individual's response is highly variable. Someone with type 2 diabetes may start with 10 to 20 units per kg to 2 kg of bodyweight per day, which equates to about 40 units of insulin per day for a 70 kg person.*

*People with type 2 diabetes are often treated without insulin—or perhaps one type of insulin (short-acting insulin)—as type 2 diabetes is a disease where the body is resistant to insulin's effects. For type 1 diabetes, an autoimmune disorder that kills pancreatic cells that make insulin, multiple types is needed. It's common, for example, for a person with type 1 diabetes to use both short-acting insulin along with a basal (intermediate- or long-acting) insulin.*

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Why? Understandably, traditional insulins have always been cheaper than their newer counterparts. Newer insulins offer better blood sugar control but are [synthetic analogs](#) of traditional insulins and are therefore more difficult to produce.

Additionally, when patents on Humulin and Novolin expired around 2000, manufacturers like Novo Nordisk had to test new pricing strategies to remain competitive.

In 2017, for example, Novo Nordisk [partnered with CVS](#) to offer Novolin at roughly 80% of the list price. Both Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly have also worked with Walmart to heavily discount insulin products under Walmart's ReliOn line of insulin products.

Retail partnerships haven't been their only strategy. In May 2017, Eli Lilly broke from their tradition of raising Humulin prices every 6 months and has since left prices alone. In fact, prices of traditional Humulin and Novolin insulins, their rapid-acting analogs ( [Humalog](#) and [Novolog](#) ), and their combination products ( Humulin 70/30, Novolog 70/30) have not gone up since then.

<a href="#">Novolin N</a> vial (10 mL)	\$92 per vial	\$0.09 per u
<a href="#">Humulin N</a> vial (10 mL)	\$183 per vial	\$0.18 per u
<a href="#">Humulin N</a> KwikPen (3 mL)	\$117 per pen	\$0.39 per u

*\*Insulin concentrations are 100 units/mL unless otherwise stated.*

## Don't miss out on savings!

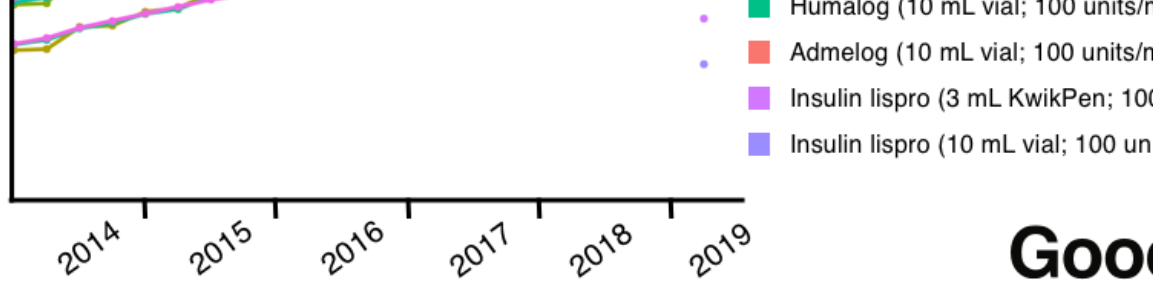
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## 2) Vials are cheaper than newer dispensers

In 1985, Novo Nordisk introduced the first insulin pen, making it more convenient for patients to inject insulin—but it came at a price. Today, retail prices of rapid-acting insulins are about 50% more for pens instead of vials. This trend isn't just relevant to rapid-acting insulins; the average price of [Humulin N](#), for example, more than doubles if you choose to use a KwikPen instead



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New dispensers make insulin more expensive. We're seeing that again with [Afrezza](#) delivered as an inhalable powder. One unit of Afrezza's insulin can cost as much as 6 times as much as rapid-acting insulins. (Afrezza's manufacturer, MannKind, offers the medication at reduced cost through a [direct purchase program](#).)

### Retail Prices of Rapid-Acting Insulins (Q2 2019)

	Price per dispenser	Price per unit
<b>Insulin lispro</b>		
<b>Generic insulin lispro</b> vial (10 mL)	\$180 per vial	\$0.18 per unit
<b>Generic insulin lispro</b> KwikPen (3 mL)	\$72 per pen	\$0.24 per unit
<b>Admelog</b> vial (10 mL)	\$291 per vial	\$0.29 per unit
<b>Admelog</b> SoloStar pen (3 mL)	\$187 per pen	\$0.37 per unit
<b>Humalog</b> vial (10 mL)	\$332 per vial	\$0.33 per unit
<b>Humalog</b> KwikPen (3 mL)	\$133 per pen	\$0.44 per unit
<b>Humalog</b> KwikPen (3 mL, 200 units/mL)	\$264 per pen	\$0.44 per unit
<b>Humalog</b> cartridge (3 mL)	\$132 per cartridge	\$0.44 per unit
<b>Humalog</b> junior KwikPen (3 mL)	\$129 per pen	\$0.43 per unit

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