



## Weekly Checkup

# Lowering Cholesterol and Government Costs

JULIANA DARROW | JANUARY 19, 2017

Recently Released [Medicare Drug Spending](#) data shows that total Part D spending reached \$137.4 billion in 2015. Spending on prescription drugs has steadily increased over the past 4 years with total spending up 63 percent since 2011. However, this number could have been substantially higher if not for a change in the manufacturing of one drug. Atorvastatin Calcium, more commonly known as Lipitor, was the most used drug by Medicare beneficiaries in 2015. Over 8 million of the approximately 55 million enrollees were perscribed this cholesterol lowering drug that year, a dramatic increase from the 700,000 who used it in 2011. The cost of this drug more than doubled between 2011 and 2012 costing \$368.67 per user. Although Lipitor's use has dramatically increased, Medicare spending on the drug has decreased. This is due to a generic version of the drug becoming available in 2012. Even assuming the cost of the drug would have stayed the same since 2012, the availability of a generic has saved the government over \$5 billion between 2013 and 2015. This is one example of why the streamlining of the [FDA generic approval process](#) is essential for cost saving.

## Medicare Spending on Atorvastatin Calcium 2011-2015

