

Press Release...



FROM THE OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE LA SHAWN K. FORD

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CDC Slams CVS Pharmacy

CHICAGO – State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford, D-Chicago, notes that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has slammed CVS for not serving those most at risk for COVID-19, so for now, CVS pharmacies will not be getting coronavirus vaccine from the federal government.

According to Chicago Tribune reporting by Lisa Schenker, “The federal government is sending additional doses of COVID-19 vaccines to pharmacies across the country, but in Illinois, those doses will only be available at Walgreens — not CVS Health, Mariano’s, Jewel-Osco or Walmart... The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention worked with states to select which pharmacy chains would receive the additional doses during this first phase of the program. They were selected based on the number of stores, ability to reach the people most at risk of getting severely ill with COVID-19 and alignment with a state’s existing vaccination plan, according to the CDC.”

“This is exactly in line with what we have been saying – that CVS pharmacies are not present in Black communities in Chicago, and are not able to serve them,” said Ford. “Our communities need more access to pharmacy services, not less. We cannot have more restrictions on patients’ choice of their pharmacy.”

Medicaid recipients with Aetna Better Health of Illinois (ABHIL), which is owned by CVS, must use CVS pharmacies or a limited number of smaller independent pharmacies. Using Walgreens pharmacies is generally no longer an option for these recipients.

Much of the West and South Sides of Chicago is a pharmacy desert. There are no CVS pharmacies in the majority Black West Side communities including Humboldt Park, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, North Lawndale, or Austin on Chicago’s West Side, where 184,000 Blacks live, as seen in Map 1.

ABHIL claims that “all of Cook County... met 100% of the [pharmacy] access requirements for Illinois Medicaid customers.” ABHIL states there are 44 pharmacies providing access to the 11,864 ABHIL Medicaid recipients living in the five Chicago West Side Zip Codes of 60612, 60623, 60624, 60644, and 60651. However, research led by pharmacy desert expert Dima Mazen Qato, PharmD, MPH, PhD showed that only 26 pharmacies, not 44, were available for general pharmacy services. In addition, Map 2 from this research shows that 55% of the census tracts in these zip codes have low-accessibility to in-network pharmacies (>0.5 miles in low-income neighborhoods).

Access problems to CVS pharmacies are also seen in Chicago's majority Black South Side in Map 3. In the last 4 years, at least 6 CVS pharmacies have closed in majority Black West and South Side communities of Chicago, three on the West Side and three on the South Side. According to 2018 data from statisticalatlas.com, 715,900 Blacks live in majority Black communities on Chicago's West and South Sides, and there are only three CVS pharmacies in those communities (53rd and Kimbark; 79th and Western; and 87th and Stony Island).

"Limiting pharmacy options for Medicaid recipients affects people not only on the West Side of Chicago, but people throughout Illinois," said Ford. "There are already severe pharmacy deserts in many parts of Illinois, and we need policies that improve access, not restrict access. During the COVID-19 pandemic when people need their medications and the coronavirus vaccine at pharmacies, and when people are dying daily due to opioid overdoses, it makes no sense for Aetna Better Health or our state Medicaid program to limit access to pharmacies."

"I've talked to representatives from CVS, Aetna, and the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) which administers our state Medicaid program to correct this injustice and this direct attack on our Black communities," said Ford. "It is bad enough for Aetna to require their patients to use CVS pharmacies when there are only three CVS pharmacies in majority Black communities in all of Chicago - it is absolutely unacceptable for Aetna to forbid their patients from using Walgreens just because they are in competition."

"I've worked with providers and advocates on a legislative fix to end this bad business practice, leading to the introduction of [House Bill 591](#), which permits Illinois Medicaid recipients, including those enrolled in managed care, to obtain pharmacy services from the pharmacy of their choice," said Ford. I look forward to working with all stakeholders to create better access to pharmacy services for our Illinois Medicaid recipients throughout the state, thereby improving their health as we continue to address structural social and racial inequities."

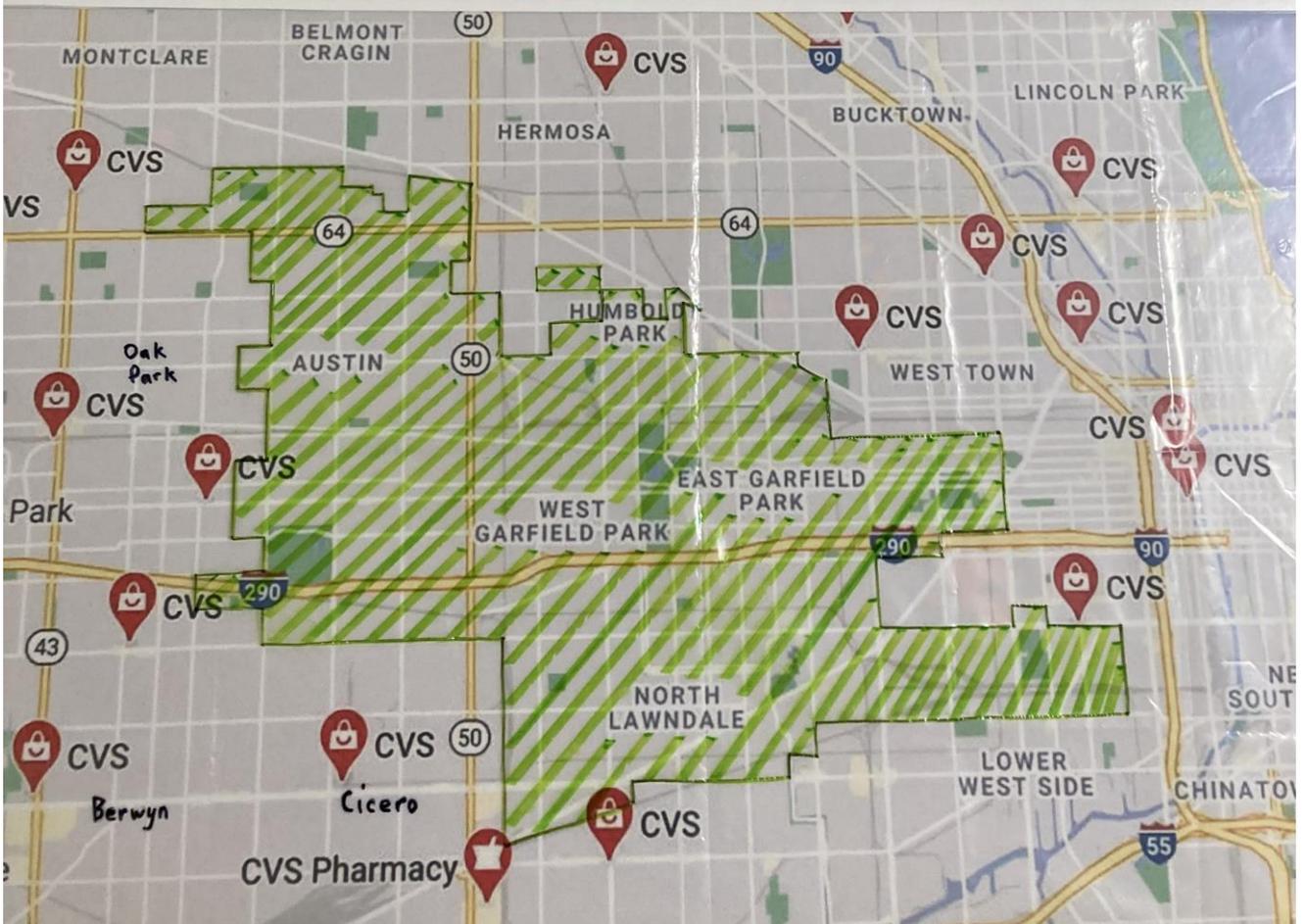
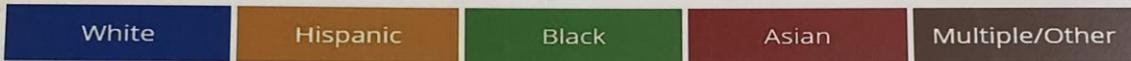
"I have also sent a letter to Illinois Attorney General Kwame Raoul asking whether there is evidence of discrimination against persons who are Illinois Medicaid recipients with Aetna Better Health Illinois (ABHIL) as their managed care organization pertaining to their access to pharmacy services, especially for Blacks living in Chicago," said Ford. "In addition, I have sent a letter to Illinois Governor JB Pritzker to take Executive Action to immediately improve access to pharmacy services for all Medicaid recipients in Illinois, including: allow all Illinois Medicaid recipients, including those enrolled in managed care, to obtain pharmacy services from the pharmacy of their choice if the pharmacy is licensed under the Pharmacy Practice Act and accepts the professional dispensing fee for pharmacy services as determined by the Department; renegotiate all current Medicaid managed care contracts regarding pharmacy access; and ensure all future Medicaid managed care contracts aim for racial equity, especially pertaining to pharmacy access."

For more information, please contact Rep. Ford at his office or email RepFord@LaShawnFord.com.

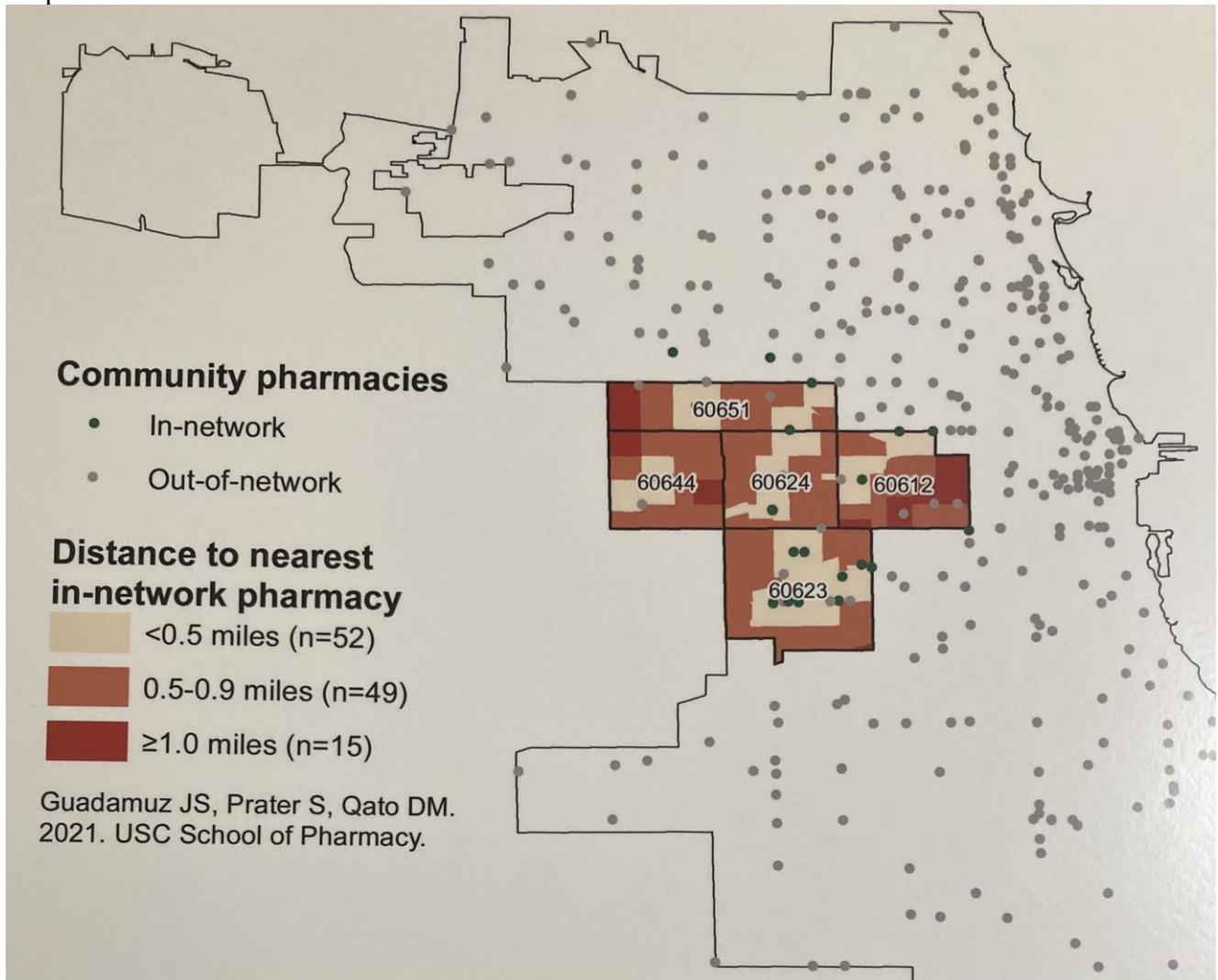
Map 1:



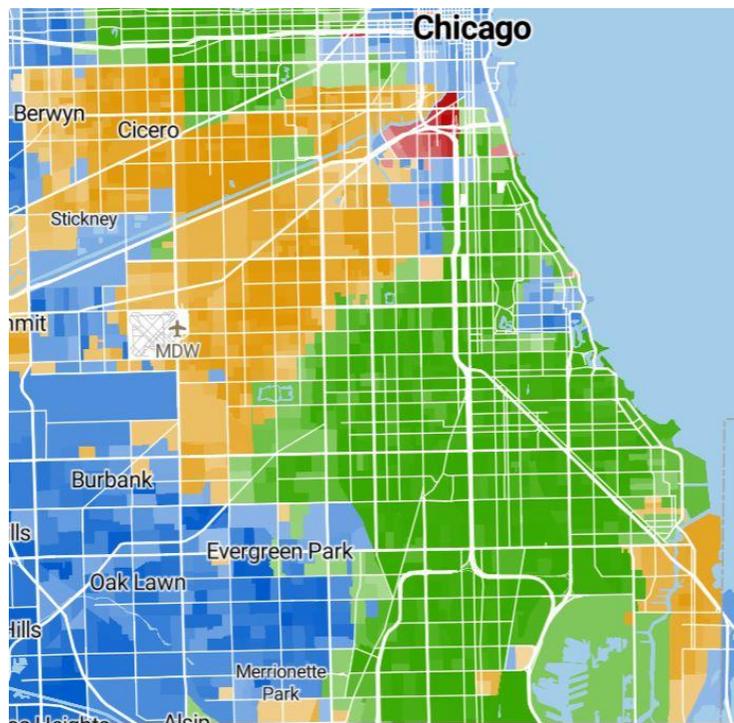
Majority Race Key



Map 2:



Map 3:



Majority Race Key



CVS Pharmacies on Chicago's South Side
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