



January 6, 2021

Problems with Medicaid – Aetna Better Health

I call on Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) to ensure greater access to pharmacy services for Illinois Medicaid recipients who have Aetna as their managed care organization.

As of December 1, 2020, Aetna Better Health Illinois Medicaid recipients must use CVS pharmacies or a limited number of smaller independent pharmacies. Using Walgreens is no longer an option for these recipients. Much of the West and South Sides of Chicago are pharmacy deserts, and CVS has closed many of their stores in these communities. There are NO CVS pharmacies in the West Side communities of Humboldt Park, East Garfield Park, West Garfield Park, North Lawndale, or Austin.

Limiting pharmacy options for Medicaid recipients affects not only people on the West and South Sides of Chicago, but people throughout Illinois. During a pandemic when people need their medications and even the coronavirus vaccine when it is distributed through pharmacies, and when people are dying daily due to opioid overdoses, it makes no sense to limit access to pharmacies. Many Medicaid recipients do not have their own cars and must use public transportation, expensive ride sharing, or even must walk miles to get their medications. Smaller independent pharmacies often cannot meet the needs of Medicaid recipients. According to HFS, the West and South Sides of Chicago have some of the highest numbers of socially vulnerable persons in Illinois. I call on Governor Pritzker and the Department of Healthcare and Family Services to live up to their claim that equity is the foundation of everything we do as a state by righting this wrong as soon as possible.

CVS Pharmacy bought the Aetna insurance company in 2018. Aetna Better Health bought IlliniCare in 2020, assuming its Illinois Medicaid patients. On December 1, 2020, Aetna restricted its Illinois Medicaid patients to only using its own CVS pharmacies and a small number of independent pharmacies, excluding Walgreens pharmacies.

By excluding the more numerous Walgreens pharmacies, it looks like CVS and Aetna is putting its profits ahead of the needs of its patients. The state of Illinois and HFS needs to change its Medicaid contract with Aetna Better Health.

If you have Medicaid-Aetna and have had problems getting your medications, please contact HFS at 312-793-4792 or 217-782-1200, or email me at RepFord@LaShawnFord.com

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District