



October 6, 2021

Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Addressing Disparities in Pharmacy Care & Access

Dear Governor Hochul:

The above-listed organizations, which are committed to promoting patient access to care, improving public health and addressing healthcare disparities in our State, write to urge your support and approval of legislation, *S.6603, Skoufis/ A.7598, Gottfried, to protect access to pharmacy services.*

We believe that we must put patients at the center of their healthcare services and we must break down all barriers to care that continue to proliferate the serious health disparities

and inequities that we have New York- all the more evident now with the COVID-19 pandemic. This legislation is in line with these priorities by ensuring continued and equitable access to pharmacy care for those with Medicaid.

Importantly, this legislation provides a number of critical patient protections in Medicaid Managed Care removing unnecessary obstacles for patients to access medication and other pharmacy services in their neighborhoods. Such obstacles serve only the interests of insurance plans and their pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs).

First, the legislation removes restrictive pharmacy networks imposed by the PBMs working for Medicaid Managed Care plans, which limit patient choice in which pharmacy an individual may use. Restrictive networks can prevent patients with Medicaid Managed Care from being able to utilize the pharmacy closest to their home and limit their ability to see their trusted pharmacist, essential for medication adherence. Those with Medicaid already face many challenges to receiving healthcare and PBM-imposed pharmacy networks should not be allowed to stand in the way of a patient using the pharmacy that is most convenient to access medications and other services needed to maintain their health.

Under this bill, an individual enrolled in Medicaid Managed Care would be able to access their local pharmacy without restrictions. *This is currently the policy in Medicaid Fee for Service, in nearly half the states in the country, and under Medicare Part D. Those with Medicaid Managed Care deserve the same access and choice.*

Another important protection in the bill would allow an individual to have one or more medications delivered to them by their local pharmacy, prohibiting the self-serving policies currently in place by large national PBMs which require patients to use out-of-state mail order pharmacies if they wish to have their prescriptions delivered. This is an important option that individuals are availing themselves of more and more as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the choice should remain with the patient, who may wish to get some medications in person and others like maintenance medications via delivery, all from the local pharmacy that they are most comfortable with and trust. When patients get all medications from one pharmacy there is a reduction in over prescribing and drug interactions, and increased adherence which results in healthier New Yorkers.

Finally, the bill would bring payment parity so all pharmacies in Medicaid receive the same reimbursement. This is important to reverse the growing number of pharmacy deserts across the State, especially in our most underserved communities with a high number of individuals enrolled in Medicaid. This bill would ensure that Medicaid funding goes to pharmacy care, not to PBM profits which drive up prescription drug costs. A number of other states have put this payment parity in place, and it provides greater transparency to what states are paying for prescription medications and returns Medicaid dollars to actual patient care as intended.

This legislation is essential to protect and ensure equitable access to pharmacy care for those with Medicaid Managed Care. The State Legislature passed this bill unanimously and we respectfully urge your approval of S6603/A7598. Please contact

Bob Graham at the NYS Bleeding Disorders Coalition with any questions or follow up at bobgraham04@msn.com.

Sincerely,

**Allergy & Asthma Network
Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY
Hemophilia Services Consortium
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Medicaid Matters New York
National Alliance on Mental Illness-New York State
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
New Yorkers for Accessible Health Coverage
New York State Bleeding Disorders Coalition
New York State Public Health Association
New York Oncology Hematology
NYS Association for Rural Health
Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center
Treatment Action Group**

Cc: Karen Persichilli Keogh, Secretary to the Governor
Jeffrey Lewis, Chief of Staff to the Governor
Elizabeth Fine, Counsel to the Governor
Jake Wilkinson, Assistant Counsel to the Governor
Alyssa DeRosa, Assistance Counsel to the Governor
Angela Profeta, Deputy Secretary for Health
Tina Kim, Assistant Secretary for Health
Rachel Baker, Assistant Secretary for Health