

PRESS RELEASE

California Pharmacies Applaud Anthem Decision to Suspend HIV/AIDS Program that Would Have Harmed Patient Choice

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Thousands of HIV/AIDS patients in California rely on their local community pharmacy to receive drugs and valuable health care advice. Many of those consumers and their pharmacies can rest easy today because Anthem Blue Cross has decided to suspend a proposed policy that would have prevented those vulnerable patients from receiving drugs from their community pharmacy and forced them to use out of state mail order.

In mid-November 2012, thousands of HIV/AIDS patients who are Anthem subscribers received notices informing them that they could no longer use their community pharmacy and instead would be forced to use mail order to fill their prescriptions. HIV patients value their longstanding relationships with their community pharmacies, which provide valuable services in assuring drug adherence, counseling, monitoring and aid in securing financial assistance to afford expensive drugs. Many of these pharmacies have been working with the disease since the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s.

Through the actions of Consumer Watchdog and the law firm of Whatley Kallas, a class action law suit was brought challenging Anthem's practices. Today Anthem announced that it was suspending the policy change.

"Today's actions demonstrate what consumers and pharmacies can achieve when they work together. Anthem's actions would have harmed thousands of vulnerable HIV/AIDS patients, preventing them from receiving the first-rate health care they need and deserve. Study after study has demonstrated that pharmacies that specialize in serving HIV/AIDS patients deliver better service, improve health care and lower health care costs," said David Balto, attorney for many of the pharmacies impacted by Anthem's policy. "This is a landmark achievement in consumers' and pharmacies' ongoing battle against restrictive health care networks. Anthem's decision to suspend their policy preserves patient choice and will lead to better health care results."

"Community pharmacies stand ready to help patients understand Anthem's mail order policy and help them select the best option for care available. Community pharmacies are committed to providing the highest quality care available to their patients," said David Balto.

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