

Dear Senators and Representatives,

I am writing to you as a clinical psychiatric pharmacist and prescriber who has worked for the Dept of Veterans Affairs for over 14 years. I have served as the mental health treatment coordinator and primary mental health prescriber for veterans throughout Southern Oregon, including rural areas such as Lakeview, Klamath Falls, and other small towns. I am also writing you as a concerned Oregonian that grew up rural Oregon and returned to live rurally. I graduated from South Medford high school, attended Rogue Community College, then received my bachelors in biochemistry and biology from SOU. After this, I received my doctorate in pharmacy from OSU/OHSU.

I would like to personally thank you for renewing your call for Congress to pass much-needed reforms to Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) practices that threaten patients. I am deeply concerned about the continued closure of pharmacies in our region and the impact it is having on our veterans' access to life-saving medications. PBM practices have played a large role in exacerbating this problem.

In recent years, we have witnessed the closure of several community pharmacies, particularly in rural areas. This has left many veterans, especially the elderly and those with limited support, without access to critical medications, particularly on weekends when our facility is not open, and delivery from the VA pharmacy takes several days. This lack of access increases the risk of adverse health outcomes, hospitalization, and even death for our veterans.

I have seen firsthand the struggles of veterans who are unable to obtain medications promptly due to pharmacy closures. In many cases, they are forced to travel long distances to find an open pharmacy or wait for extended periods to have their prescriptions filled, placing undue stress on them and exacerbating their health conditions. This situation is particularly dire in rural areas like Curry, Lakeview and Klamath County, where pharmacy closures are more prevalent. But I have even seen this happen in Medford on the weekends when veterans leave a local hospital and our VA is closed on weekends. Even the closure of larger pharmacies like Walgreens and Rite Aid in Medford is impacting patients having timely access to medications. This includes veterans that do not receive any care from the VA.

The dominance of PBMs in the market and their profit-driven policies pose significant challenges to independent pharmacies and contribute to higher out-of-pocket expenses for patients. Your leadership on this issue is commendable, and I hope that Congress will take decisive action to address these unfair practices.

I urge you to continue fighting for policies that support access to affordable medications for our veterans and protect the viability of independent pharmacies in our communities. Your advocacy is crucial in ensuring that our veterans receive the care and support they deserve.

Thank you for your attention to these critical issues to keep pharmacies in Oregon open and veterans safe,

Sincerely,

Dr. Richardson, PharmD, BCPP

Clinical Psychiatric Pharmacist