

THE Skanner

Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now

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Opinion

Policymakers Should Support Patients With Chronic Conditions

Oregon stands at a crossroads in its effort to make healthcare more equitable and accessible. As an organization that advocates for people living with HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis, the Community Access National Network urges lawmakers to reject HB 2385 and oppose the unchecked expansion of the 340B Drug Pricing Program in Oregon.

The 340B Program was established with good intentions. Enacted by Congress in 1992, its purpose was to enable safety-net providers to purchase prescription medications at steep discounts and to use those savings to expand access to care for vulnerable populations. But the program has strayed far from this mission. As it exists today, 340B too often serves institutional financial gain rather than directly benefiting patients, leaving patients to ask “What about me?”

This misalignment is dangerous for people living with HIV and hepatitis. We face chronic health needs and depend on consistent, affordable access to life-saving medications. Expanding a broken system under HB 2385 threatens to deepen healthcare dis-



Jen Laws
President & CEO of
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parities rather than alleviate them.

The HIV and hepatitis communities depend on highly coordinated, accessible care. Yet in many cases, patients served through the 340B net-

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work are not actually seeing the benefits of discounted drugs. For example, when a hospital purchases a medicine at a 340B discount and then partners with a contract pharmacy to dispense it, the patient is often charged the full retail price. The savings

are instead shared between the hospital and pharmacy, not passed on to the person in need.

Studies have found that 340B revenues incentivize consolidation by driving 340B hospitals to acquire physician practices in wealthy areas. Meanwhile, 340B contract pharmacy arrangements are increasingly consolidated into large pharmacy chains located in higher-income communities. This consolidation reduces access to care, particularly for marginalized and rural populations, who often find themselves excluded from expanded 340B networks.

HB 2385 would permit further expansion of 340B contract pharmacy arrangements without adding transparency or accountability. 48% of Oregon 340B hospital contracts are with out-of-state pharmacies, and only 26% of in-state contract pharmacies are located in medically underserved areas. Simply expanding the program's footprint without reform will not improve care for rural or underserved populations.

It will, however, increase opportunities for markup and profiteering, further inflat-

ing drug costs and reducing the affordability of care. Expanding contract pharmacies defeats the program's goal of expanding access to care by rewarding profiteering entities rather than constraining them, putting more resources in the hands of those least accountable to vulnerable patients.

A recent report reveals how 340B participants are using the program to markup drug prices significantly by as much as 700%, sometimes more, while pocketing the difference instead of lowering costs for patients. In 2023 alone, \$6.6 billion in employer healthcare costs were attributed to lost rebates on 340B prescriptions, and \$1.8 billion in state and federal tax revenue was lost in 2021 due to this misalignment. These numbers speak to a system spiraling away from its core mission and becoming a hidden tax on patients, employers, and taxpayers alike.

In Oregon, these problems are compounded by healthcare challenges. The Oregon Health Authority has noted persistent racial and geographic disparities in access to primary and specialty care, especially in rural areas and among Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color.

Read the rest of this commentary at [TheSkanner.com](https://www.theskanner.com)

House Committee Votes to Strip CFPB's Victim Compensation Fund

For more than a decade, consumers have lauded the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) for its myriad accomplishments that have brought transparency and fairness to the financial marketplace. Earlier this year, a survey commissioned by the Center for Responsible Lending found that 82 percent of Americans believe it is important to regulate financial services to ensure they are fair for consumers.

Research, regulation, investigations, and litigation were among the effective tools CFPB used to return more than \$21 billion to over 200 million defrauded consumers.

At the same time, the anti-regulatory interests that opposed CFPB's creation never stopped trying to weaken, defy, or eliminate the agency. Now with a president and Congress actively embracing a deregulatory stance, the combination of pro-business presidential executive orders vigorously pursued by executive appointees have wreaked financial harm on consumers and compromised the agency's mission.

From slashing CFPB staffing by 70 percent, halting both investigations and pending litigation, to reversing reg-



Charlene Crowell
Guest Columnist

ulations on overdraft and credit cards, in recent days a third anti-consumer move announced the agency would not enforce regulation of 'buy now, pay later' credit. In sum, today's agency actions

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Yet the fight to neuter CFPB is still not done. It is now moving monies—denying or delaying millions that consumers are rightfully owed, and sending billions of dollars earmarked for victim compensation to the U.S. Treasury instead.

A pending, real-life case illustrates the harm wrought by such moves, and the financial injustice that results.

This February, several state attorneys general began restitution inquiries owed by Prehire, LLC. Earlier, CFPB determined that Prehired, LLC, an unlicensed online sales training program, violated two federal laws: the Truth in Lending Act, and Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. The firm lured prospective tech sales students with false promises of guaranteed minimal annual earnings of \$60,000 at a 'tech company of their choice.' The cost per student was half that amount - \$30,000. Then the firm sold loans to its students to cover enrollment costs.

A March 12 joint letter to CFPB that asked about the status of payments to Prehire's victims failed to receive a reply. On May 06, a follow-up letter restated their earlier concerns.

Terming Prehire as “a predatory online training bootcamp,” the state attorneys general in Colorado, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, and South Carolina as well as the California Department of Financial Protection and Innovation, wrote in part:

“Prehired trapped its students with illegal and deceptive “income share” loans. Prehired then resorted to

abusive debt collection practices—including filing hundreds of debt collection lawsuits—when students could not repay those loans and the job offers Prehired promised did not materialize. Prehired specifically targeted military veterans with its advertising.” “Prehired was in bankruptcy and unable to issue refunds to its victims,” the letter continued. “In such cases, the CFPB's Civil Penalty Fund is available to compensate harmed victims. Our offices worked with the CFPB to secure an allocation from the Civil Penalty Fund, in the amount of \$4,248,249. The CFPB finalized the allocation on May 30, 2024.”

Ironically, a recent party-line vote by the House Financial Services Committee (HFSC) approved a resolution to remove CFPB's ability to repay defrauded consumers from its Civil Penalty Fund (CPF). If subsequently passed by Congress, the fund's unallocated revenues would be given to the Treasury Department, instead of remaining available to compensate victims.

Billions of dollars at stake. In June 2024, the Office of Inspector General at the CFPB reported that the CPF had collected \$3.4 billion and held a balance of \$1.9 billion, as of September 2023.

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