

UnitedHealthcare CEO gunned down on New York City street

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A law enforcement manhunt is underway in New York City for the person who shot and killed UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson on the sidewalk outside of a Manhattan hotel on Wednesday morning.

The New York Police Department (NYPD) called the shooting a “premeditated, preplanned, targeted attack.” The shooter fired several shots and struck Thompson, 50, in the back and leg at around 6:45 a.m. The health insurance executive was shot as he prepared to enter the Hilton Midtown hotel for a company investor conference.

Thompson was taken to Mount Sinai West Hospital and pronounced dead at 7:12 a.m.

The suspect fled the scene on foot and then on an e-bicycle. He remains at large and was last seen in Central Park. Police are offering a \$10,000 reward for information in the case.

Nearby surveillance video released on social media shows Thompson walking south on 6th Avenue toward the entrance to the hotel as the shooter, who had been waiting for the CEO, steps onto the sidewalk from the street side.

The shooter is seen raising and then firing his silencer-equipped handgun, hitting Thompson in the back. Thomson briefly turns to see who shot him as he stumbles to the ground. The shooter walks toward him and continues to fire his weapon, even though his gun apparently jammed at least three times.

NYPD Chief of Detectives Joseph Kenny said the shooter arrived at the scene about five minutes before the shooting. “It appears that the gun malfunctions as he clears the jam and begins to fire again,” he said.

Police recovered three live 9 mm rounds and three discharged 9 mm shell casings from the scene, Kenny said. A cellphone and an empty water bottle were also recovered along the route the suspect used to flee the scene.

The NYPD subsequently released several images from

other surveillance cameras in the city of an individual wearing a dark hooded jacket and a gray backpack that match the appearance of the suspect from the video of the shooting.

Kenny described the suspect as a light-skinned male wearing a light brown or cream-colored jacket, a black face mask, black and white sneakers and “a very distinctive gray backpack.”

Stopping short of calling the shooter a professional, investigators have noted the planned character of the attack and the fact that the suspect is “proficient in using firearms as he was able to clear the malfunctions pretty quickly.”

Brian Thompson was named CEO of UnitedHealthcare, the health insurance and managed care division of UnitedHealth Group, in 2021. He joined the company in 2004 and worked in its mergers and acquisitions department.

United Healthcare provides health insurance for 49 million people in the US. It is also the largest provider of Medicare Advantage plans, the privately run versions of the US government's Medicare program for people aged 65 and older. The company also sells individual insurance and administers coverage for thousands of employer insurance programs.

Thompson has overseen a significant growth of the UnitedHealthcare over the past three years. The insurance company brought in \$74 billion in revenue in the most recent quarter. Thompson had a \$10.2 million annual compensation package, made up of salary, bonus and stock options awards, and he was one of the highest-paid executives within the UnitedHealth Group.

UnitedHealth Group has been at the center of capitalist profiteering through the healthcare system in the US, especially following the passage of the misnamed Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare, by the Obama administration in 2010.

Through a series of mergers and acquisitions UnitedHealth Group and its subsidiaries have grown into a massive entity with tentacles reaching into every aspect of healthcare—insurance, pharmacy, healthcare services, healthcare providers—and extracting enormous profits for its Wall Street investors.

In 2023, UnitedHealth Group generated \$23.1 billion in net income on \$371.6 billion in revenue. UnitedHealth Group has a stock market value of \$474.3 billion as of July 15, 2024. The giant health care conglomerate is ranked 8th on the 2024 Forbes Fortune Global 500 list, and it is the 5th largest corporation by revenue.

UnitedHealth Group was holding an annual investor conference on Wednesday in New York City which was abruptly cancelled after the shooting. The company said in a statement that it was “deeply saddened and shocked.”

No motive has yet been established for Thompson’s murder. CBS News reported that investigators and security at UnitedHealthcare are going through company files and records “looking for possible previous threats, and disgruntled or recently fired workers, a law enforcement source said. The company said it is cooperating with the investigation. Police are also looking at social media and interviewing employees, family members and others who knew Thompson.

Speaking to NBC News in a phone call, Thompson’s wife Paulette said her husband had been receiving threats. “There had been some threats,” she said. “Basically, I don’t know, a lack of coverage? I don’t know details. I just know that he said there were some people that had been threatening him.”

Law enforcement officials were aware of the threats, according the *New York Times*, which reported, “The police are still investigating the source and exact nature of those threats, the official said. Chief executive officers of health care companies often receive threats because of the nature of their work.” However, Thompson was not traveling with any security.

Another report in the *New York Post* said that Thompson was one of several UnitedHealthcare senior executives who were under investigation by the Department of Justice for insider trading.

The *Post* said Thompson “exercised stock options and sold shares worth \$15.1 million on Feb. 16, less than two weeks before news of the federal antitrust probe went public, according to a *Crain’s New York Business* report from April.

“The stock price dropped sharply after the revelation that the DOJ was investigating whether the company had

made acquisitions that consolidated its market position in violation of antitrust laws, a source familiar with the probe told the outlet.”

The *Post* continued that the *Crain’s* report indicated that Thompson, “along with UnitedHealth Group chairman Stephen Helmsley, Chief People Officer Erin McSweeney and Chief Accounting Officer Tom Roos, sold a combined \$101.5 million in shares, with Helmsley personally netting just shy of \$85 million.”

The public response to the shooting of Thompson on social media reflects the widespread hatred of the health insurance giants such as UnitedHealthcare. As noted by Rolling Stone, “Americans expressed virtually no sympathy for the apparently targeted killing of UnitedHealthcare’s CEO by mystery gunman in New York.”

UnitedHealthcare has notoriously used its enormous power to deny coverage of specific health conditions, especially mental health services. According to a report in *Modern Healthcare* by Annie Waldman of ProPublica,

For years, it was a mystery: Seemingly out of the blue, therapists would feel like they’d tripped some invisible wire and become a target of UnitedHealth Group.

A company representative with the Orwellian title “care advocate” would call and grill them about why they’d seen a patient twice a week or weekly for six months.

In case after case, United would refuse to cover care, leaving patients to pay out-of-pocket or go without it. The severity of their issues seemed not to matter.



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