

125,000 insured by Anthem Blue Cross dropped from Scripps San Diego health system

Max Jones
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On new year's day an estimated 125,000 residents of San Diego, California, insured under Anthem Blue Cross were shocked to learn they lost all access to their insurance coverage at their healthcare provider, Scripps Health, one of the largest in San Diego. Those impacted received a message informing them that, "Scripps Health is now out of network with Anthem Blue Cross, effective January 1st, 2025."

Months of negotiations between Scripps Health and Anthem Blue Cross, the latter of which had total assets of \$108.92 billion as of 2023, resulted in a contract termination between Anthem Blue Cross and Scripps Health, eliminating Scripps as an "in network" provider for Anthem. The disputes are over pay and increases in costs that Scripps Health will be paid for provided care. The \$4.3 billion health system is cynically claiming that the increased costs are a result of minimum wage increases for healthcare workers, in addition to increasing drug costs, and "government mandates." According to Scripps, emergency room visits will still be covered.

Tens of thousands of patients who have lost access to their providers are now scrambling for coverage, including many who are in the process of receiving critical care. One patient who lost her coverage at Scripps noted on Reddit, "I'm literally having a c section in 2 weeks at a Scripps hospital.... what the f**k. I shouldn't be dealing with this type of stress right now." While patients with planned emergency procedures may be able to apply and obtain continued coverage, they have to go through the tenuous process of applying for "continuity of care," which must be reviewed and approved.

Many people are also expressing frustration and skepticism in the process of applying for continued care, which if not successful could result in their personal bankruptcy or outright denial of healthcare. Another

patient noted that they are "devastated. This is incredibly stressful for those with chronic illnesses. I've applied for the continuation of care but you can't get anyone on the phone to verify if it was received. I hate this."

Another added, "So pissed off at both anthem and Scripps. My husband's whole oncology team is with Scripps and I have a huge surgery scheduled in February. I know we can try to apply for continuity of care but I have also heard horror stories of those requests taking forever with people getting the run around and ultimately being denied."

According to Anthem Blue Cross, more than 80 percent of their members are insured through their employer. A large group of workers affected by the drop of coverage are in the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 135 which consists of over 13,000 workers in the grocery, retail, pharmacy, medical, dental, plant, casino and cannabis industry, roughly 10,000 of which are affected by the dropping of Scripps Health according to the president of the local.

Instead of waging a struggle to demand the immediate resumption of coverage, the UFCW bureaucracy has been focused on the claim that the hardship and scramble for coverage "is completely outside the union's control. Despite our efforts to demand transparency and communication from Anthem, they failed to provide the necessary updates or notice to the union."

The inaction by the UFCW bureaucracy is unsurprising, as this is the same organization that continues to push through and accept contracts that lock in poverty wages for grocery workers and only benefit the employers. This includes the contract in July 2024 for 6,000 Food 4 Less workers that increased starting wages only \$0.30 above the state minimum wage of \$16 an hour, with \$0.25 increases between steps. The acceptance of the agreement

by the UFCW bureaucrats came despite workers' determination to wage a struggle to fight pummeling inflation and the high cost of living.

The UFCW directed those upset over their termination by Anthem to "please contact their customer service representatives," sending them down the dead end of customer service complaints. Due to their political and financial ties to the corporate elite and Democratic Party, the union bureaucracies will not fight for the most basic rights of their members, let alone organize workers against the criminal subordination of healthcare to profit.

The cynical UFCW statement concludes, "Sadly, corporations continue to place profits over people. Even in the healthcare industry," and that there is nothing the working class can do about it. Despite the unions' attempts to sow defeat and complacency, ending the subordination of public health to profit is a demand that can and must be fought for by the international working class.

The US is currently in its 10th wave of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, with wastewater spikes of the virus in mid-December reaching their highest levels in three years. The highly contagious Norovirus, which causes gastrointestinal illness, is also currently surging, with a record 91 distinct outbreaks across the country in the first week of December. These waves are all further burdening healthcare systems. In California it has been less than a month since Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency over the threat of bird flu, which just claimed its first fatality in Louisiana.

In this context, the loss of a healthcare provider for 125,000 residents of San Diego has serious public health implications. Removing the profit motive in healthcare can only be achieved through an international mass movement of workers that is politically independent of all agents of capitalism in the fight for socialism.

The World Socialist Web Site writes in its New Year Statement:

The past five years have been dominated by the response of the ruling class to the capitalist crisis. The next five years will be dominated by an explosive eruption of the class struggle, which is already under way. Workers throughout the world confront an escalating global war; an ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, along with the emergence of new pathogens like H5N1 bird flu and mpox; a coordinated assault on basic democratic rights and

a massive increase in exploitation and social want.

Underlying these interlinked crises is an oligarchy that subordinates all of society to profit and the accumulation of personal wealth. The fight against the oligarchy is by its very nature a revolutionary task. Its wealth must be expropriated and its stranglehold over economic and political life abolished. This requires the mobilization of the working class, on a world scale, to take political power, establish democratic control over the process of production, and reorganize society on the basis of socialism—that is, on the basis of social need, not private profit.

The incoming Trump administration and his nomination of anti-science hacks to head America's top public health agencies—including Dr. Jay Bhattacharya as director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Dr. Mehmet Oz as head the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. as Secretary of Health and Human Services—signal a stepped-up assault on all aspects of public health, including large-scale losses of insurance coverage. An organized and concerted fight against these attacks must link up with the struggle of healthcare workers who for decades have fought against understaffing and poor patient outcomes.

Healthcare insurance giants such as Anthem Blue Cross and UnitedHealthcare provoke outrage and disgust among the working class and broader public due to the grotesque and criminal subordination of human life and health for profit, as shown in the response to the assassination of the UnitedHealth CEO.

But this outrage must be channeled into mobilizing the independent strength of the working class. Rank-and-file committees must be built by grocery and retail workers at every workplace, uniting them with nurses, healthcare staff and doctors fighting for the highest levels of patient care and against the brutal for-profit healthcare industry.

Contact *the WSWS today if you have had your Scripps healthcare coverage dropped by Anthem or are a healthcare worker concerned about these critical issues.*



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