

Since pharmaceutical companies began limiting access to lifesaving medications, leaders with Ascension Illinois—part of a nonprofit, Catholic health system in Illinois and 18 other states—are seeing a harmful downside for patients.

A number of pharmaceutical companies have implemented restrictions that force Ascension Illinois hospitals to select only one contract pharmacy within a defined mileage radius under the federal 340B drug discount program. Many pharmacies that dispense specialty medications are farther than the typically allowed 40-mile radius from the hospitals. As a result, for the past three years, Ascension Illinois hospitals have been restricted from providing patients with help accessing critically needed specialty medications at affordable prices.

Such restrictions have worsened health disparities and overall health for many Illinoisans. As federally designated Disproportionate Share Hospitals, Ascension Illinois hospitals that participate in the 340B program serve a significantly disproportionate number of low-income Medicare patients.

The 340B drug discount program began in 1992 as a way to help hospitals and other healthcare providers that care for low-income and uninsured patients “stretch scarce federal resources as far as possible, reaching more eligible patients and providing more comprehensive services.”

As part of the program, pharmaceutical companies were required to sell prescription drugs to healthcare providers at discounted rates, which hospitals use to invest in patients through programs and services, along with lower drug costs for patients. Recent actions by pharmaceutical companies have had detrimental effects, yet hospitals like those with Ascension Illinois continue to keep the promise of 340B.

The following Ascension Illinois hospitals participate in the 340B program: Ascension Mercy in Aurora; Ascension Saint Francis in Evanston; Ascension Saint Joseph – Chicago; Ascension Saint Joseph – Elgin; Ascension Saint Mary in Kankakee; Ascension Saint Alexius in Hoffman Estates; and Ascension Saints Mary and Elizabeth in Chicago.

These Ascension Illinois hospitals use their 340B savings to:

- Help patients with their prescription drug costs;
- Assist patients through infusion clinics, specialty pharmacies and retail pharmacies;
- Provide post-discharge medications at no charge to qualified patients;
- Provide post-discharge and chronic disease therapy management to patients, totaling over 10,000 visits annually;
- Support patients on high-cost, high-acute specialty medications, which has reduced patient out-of-pocket expenses by over \$1 million annually;
- Hold Medical Mission at Home events that provide free medical, vision and dental services to those in need; and
- Offer the evidence-based Mental Health First Aid training to community partners that work with youth and first responders.

As hospitals have faced increased labor, drug and supply costs in recent years, lost 340B savings are squeezing hospitals even more. For Ascension Illinois hospitals, the 340B program not only helps patients but also enables hospitals to better serve the surrounding communities, both inside and outside the walls of the hospital.

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