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Groups Are Concerned Walgreens's Collaboration with Catholic Health Provider Will Limit Consumer Access to Important Medical Services

Nineteen public interest organizations that advocate for patients' rights and comprehensive health care access are concerned about the impact on health care consumers of a [collaboration between the nation's largest drug store chain, Walgreens, and a Catholic health care provider](#), Providence Health & Services, to open up to 25 in-store health clinics in Washington State and Oregon.

In a letter emailed to Walgreens today, the 19 organizations sought to learn whether religious doctrine will limit access to important medical services, information, and referrals at the clinics operated by Providence Health & Services and its affiliate, Swedish Health Services, and will limit Walgreens's pharmacies' ability to fill prescriptions.

"We appreciate Walgreens's objective to provide customers with convenient access to basic health services. However, as Providence is a religious health system, we are very concerned that these clinics will limit patients' access to important health services," the groups wrote. "Customers or patients who request services at these clinics or at Walgreens's pharmacies are entitled to assurances that the services, information, and referrals they receive will not be restricted by religious doctrine."

The proposed clinics will be owned and operated by Providence and will be staffed by Providence and Swedish Health Services employees. Providence is a Catholic health care system that is required to follow the Ethical and Religious Directives (ERDs) promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. These directives forbid or severely restrict critical reproductive and end-of-life health care services at Catholic health facilities, including contraception, abortions, fertility treatments, vasectomies, tubal ligations, aid in dying, and advance directives that are contrary to Catholic teachings.

Some religious health systems even restrict the information and referrals that their health providers are allowed to give to patients. Further, adherence to the ERDs increases the likelihood that LGBTQ individuals and their families will face discrimination in seeking to access health care services consistent with their medical needs.

When Swedish Health Services affiliated with Providence in 2012, it stopped providing what it terms "elective" abortions at Swedish facilities. When Harrison Medical Center in Bremerton, Washington affiliated with a religious health system in 2013, doctors at Harrison were no longer able to prescribe medications to assist with aid in dying, as allowed by Washington's Death with Dignity law.

“In our states we have consistently seen that when secular entities join with religious health systems, the services, information or referrals provided at the secular entity become limited by religious doctrine,” the groups wrote. “Customers and patients have the right to information regarding all of their options in order to make educated health care decisions. How does Walgreens plan to protect its customers’ rights to receive information about all available reproductive and end-of-life health information?”

The following groups signed the letter:

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American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon
American Civil Liberties Union of Washington
Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO)
Basic Rights Oregon
Compassion & Choices
Gender Justice League
Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc.
Legal Voice
MergerWatch
NARAL Pro-Choice Oregon
NARAL Pro-Choice Washington
National Health Law Program
Northwest Health Law Advocates
Oregon Foundation for Reproductive Health
Pierce County AIDS Foundation
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Oregon
Planned Parenthood Votes Northwest & Hawaii
Pride Foundation
Western States Center