

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 3, 2020

David S. Wichmann
Chief Executive Officer
UnitedHealth Group
P.O. Box 1459
Minneapolis, MN 55440

Dear Mr. Wichmann,

I write to request more information on the actions that your company, United Health Group, which sells short-term limited duration insurance (STLDI) plans in Wisconsin under its subsidiary Golden Rule Insurance Company, is taking in the midst of this outbreak of novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. We must all work together to address this outbreak, and I am concerned that the potential of high out-of-pocket health care costs could result in STLDI policy holders foregoing testing for COVID-19, inhibiting the public health response to this crisis.

On September 3, 2018, the Trump Administration released a final rule¹ that allowed STLDI plans to be sold for up to three years, with options for automatic re-enrollment. These plans, which were once limited to being sold for periods of three months or less, are not required to provide coverage for pre-existing conditions or essential health benefits, and can leave patients on the hook for thousands of dollars in unexpected costs. I am deeply concerned about the impact that these high costs have on individuals, patients and the community at large during public health emergencies, including the current COVID-19 outbreak. I write to request more information on the extent to which your company, as one of the eight companies that reportedly sells an STLDI plan in the state of Wisconsin, is taking action to ensure that individual policyholders are not placing their health or the health of the public at risk by foregoing care due to concerns about cost.

During an outbreak, it is critical that Wisconsinites and all Americans have access to the health care services they need. Unfortunately, we know that patients often forego recommended tests and treatments because of cost.² When an individual's source of health coverage is an STLDI plan, out-of-pocket costs are often a serious concern. On February 24, 2020, the *Miami Herald* reported on a Florida man who could face thousands of dollars in costs for seeking care when he thought he might have contracted coronavirus while travelling in China.³ Although tests confirmed that he had seasonal influenza and not COVID-19, two weeks later, he received a bill with charges totaling \$3,270. His STLDI plan will not pay the costs without further

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/08/03/2018-16568/short-term-limited-duration-insurance>

² <https://www.norc.org/PDFs/WHI%20Healthcare%20Costs%20Coverage%20and%20Policy/WHI%20Healthcare%20Costs%20Coverage%20and%20Policy%20Issue%20Brief.pdf>

³ <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/health-care/article240476806.html>

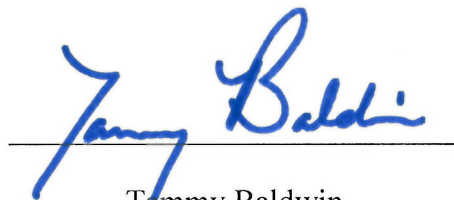
documentation, and regardless of this documentation, he will still be required to pay \$1,400 in out-of-pocket costs for the brief diagnostic encounter.⁴

I am concerned that this patient's experience is emblematic of a larger problem, and that individuals nationwide who are covered by an STLDI plan, including more than 15,000 Wisconsinites, could face difficult decisions about whether or not to seek testing for COVID-19. As one of the eight companies that reportedly sells an STLDI plan in the state of Wisconsin, I request that you respond immediately to the following questions:

1. Please provide an overview of information that you have shared with individuals who carry one of your STLDI policies about the costs associated with testing for COVID-19.
2. Please provide an overview of information that you have shared with individuals who carry one of your STLDI policies about the costs associated with obtaining treatment in the event of a positive diagnosis of COVID-19.
3. If an individual who carries one of your plans seeks testing to diagnose a potential case of COVID-19, can you guarantee that you *will not* impose cost-sharing requirements beyond those of an ACA-compliant plan?
4. If an individual who carries one of your plans is diagnosed with COVID-19, can you guarantee that you *will not* terminate their coverage, increase their premiums, or carve out coverage of their illness as a pre-existing condition?

During a public health crisis, it is vital that individuals understand their coverage options and seek appropriate medical attention. When patients go without needed testing or treatment because of cost concerns, we are all placed at greater risk. I strongly encourage you to consider taking immediate action to reduce the out-of-pocket costs of testing for and treatment of COVID-19 for individuals covered by one of your STLDI plans in the interest of protecting the nation's public health.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

⁴ <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/health-care/article240476806.html>