



December 8, 2016

The Honorable Edward Ehlinger, MD, MSPH
Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Health
625 N. Robert St.
St. Paul, MN 55155-2538

VIA EMAIL

Ed.ehlinger@state.mn.us

Dear Commissioner Ehlinger:

I write to you today with concern about the availability of health care services for residents of Roseau County in 2017. As you know, under Minnesota law, insurance companies selling health plans that require or incentivize patients to use narrow provider networks must ensure that the plan provides patients with sufficient access to providers within defined geographic service areas. Specifically, sufficient access is defined as the lesser of 30 miles or 30 minutes for primary care, mental health, and general hospital services. For specialty services and specialized hospital services, the limit is 60 miles or 60 minutes.

The narrow network being offered in Roseau County by Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) has raised great concern among patients in this region. The BCBS plan does not include Altru Health System clinics or LifeCare Medical Center as an option in the narrow network for individual and family plans offered in Roseau County. This impacts approximately 1,000 people throughout the county.

Beginning January 1, 2017, patients will be required to travel to Sanford Health in Thief River Falls for primary care services to be in network. The distance to Thief River Falls from any of the major cities in Roseau County is more than 30 miles. The distance from Warroad to Thief River Falls is approximately 90 miles; from Roseau to Thief River Falls is approximately 60 miles; and from Greenbush to Thief River Falls is approximately 40 miles. This offering through BCBS is in violation of the network adequacy requirements as outlined by Minnesota law.

The patients I have spoken with do not want to make a change from their local provider in Roseau County to a provider at Sanford in Thief River Falls. They want to maintain their relationship and receive primary care services close to home.

On behalf of the patients impacted in Roseau County, I request that you review the BCBS product offered with a narrow network to ensure proper network adequacy. Patients should not have to travel these distances for primary care services.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Okeson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Keith W. Okeson, President/CEO
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CC: Gov. Mark Dayton, Rep. Dan Fabian, Sen. Mark Johnson