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Groups Protest Racial, Economic Differences in CVS Health Code Violations

Demand CVS unlock condoms in all communities

NEW YORK—Leaders of community organizations criticized racial differences in CVS drugstores' health code violations revealed in a new analysis of food-safety inspections at a press conference and rally outside a Harlem CVS today. State inspectors recently cited the CVS on West 125th Street for rodent droppings and a rodent carcass on the retail area floor, and the protesters cited findings that this kind of problem is more common at CVS stores in New York's communities of color.

After chanting "CVS Clean up your act," about two dozen protestors went into the CVS and delivered a letter addressed to CVS CEO Tom Ryan criticizing conditions at the Harlem CVS and at CVS stores around New York where people of color are in the majority.

CRITICAL VIOLATIONS IN NYC COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

According to the Cure CVS campaign, state inspectors have found "critical deficiencies" 71% more often in New York City CVS stores in areas where the majority of residents are people of color than in communities where people of color are in the minority, since 2004. CVS has also been cited 39 percent more often for vermin violations, such as those found recently in the Harlem store, in communities of color than at stores in majority white zip codes.

"As an organization that specifically works with Latinos who are HIV-positive or have AIDS, we find it disturbing that CVS stores in communities of color violate health codes more often than stores in mostly white areas. The impact on individuals with suppressed immune systems could be devastating," said Oscar Raúl López, director of health policy for the Latino Commission on AIDS.

Also speaking at the event were representatives from the African Services Committee, the Harlem United Community AIDS Center, and the NYU Chapter of Gentlemen of Quality.

ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

There are also economic differences in CVS health code violations. State inspectors have issued critical health code violations an average of 84 percent more often to CVS stores operating in lower-income communities (median household income below \$40,000) than to CVS stores operating in zip codes with

higher median household incomes, according to Cure CVS. Overall violations per store are nearly 20 percent higher at stores in less-affluent parts of the city.

CONDOMS LOCKED IN NYC COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Public health advocates at the event also criticized CVS for putting condoms in locked display cabinets in the Harlem store and elsewhere. “I find it hard to understand why a corporation like CVS keeps condoms in locked cabinets – especially in communities that are hardest hit by HIV/AIDS,” said López. “The impact that this practice has on young people who want to protect themselves or prevent an unintended pregnancy will be felt for years to come.”

Advocates say requiring young people to find an employee, ask them to unlock the condom display and then make their selection while the employee looks on can deter youth from protecting themselves and their partners against pregnancy and diseases. In a number of cities, CVS is more likely to lock condoms in communities of color than in majority-white areas according to a report released in December by Cure CVS.

After community protests, some CVS stores in Boston and Philadelphia recently unlocked their condom cases. Today, protesters demanded that CVS adopt a national policy against locking up condoms in any store. CVS main competitor, Walgreens, has a policy against locking up condoms.

Similar events were also held today in Dallas, Los Angeles and San Diego while advocates are informing consumers about similar issues outside CVS drugstores in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Houston and Orlando today. News of today’s demonstrations against CVS’s policies comes on the heels of protests outside CVS drugstores last week in Boston and Miami. These events across the country highlight a pattern with CVS’s poor behavior that is not restricted to individual stores and taken together, point to a corporate problem.

For more information visit www.CureCVSNow.org

Cure CVS is an initiative by Change to Win and partner organizations to reform the drugstore industry, starting with CVS, the country’s leading provider of prescription drugs and largest drugstore chain. By joining concerned citizen groups with the six million members of Change to Win unions, Cure CVS aims to ensure that CVS provides equal access across all communities and income levels to its stores and services, offers fair and accurate prices, provides quality products and services, protects customers’ privacy and puts quality pharmacy care first.

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