HEALTHCARE IN THE U.S.

by Veronica Riccobene

writing for *The Lever*

As rising health care costs and inadequate insurance coverage leave 1 in 3 Americans saddled with medical debt, the nation’s top health insurers have dumped billions into enriching their executives and top shareholders through lucrative stock buybacks.

All in all, the country’s largest health insurers have invested over $120 billion into repurchasing their own shares since the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010. These include UnitedHealth Group; Cigna; Elevance Health, the parent company of Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield; and CVS Health, which acquired Aetna in 2018.

44% of buyback expenditures came from UnitedHealth Group, which covers more Americans than any other private health insurer. UnitedHealth has increased its annual share repurchasing program by 217 percent since 2010, dumping a whopping $54 billion into buybacks during that time.

These companies, along with Kaiser Permanente, a nonprofit health care organization, control over half of the commercial market share of the U.S. health insurance industry. Since 2010, they’ve raked in a combined $9 trillion in revenue, netting more than $371 billion in profits. Meanwhile, 1 in 4 Americans say they’ve avoided seeking health care in the past year because of the cost. Half of all U.S. adults say they’d be unable to afford an unexpected $500 medical expense, and medical bills account for 40 percent of U.S. bankruptcies.

Major insurers have abandoned patients for shareholder enrichment, according to former health insurance executive-turned-whistleblower Wendell Potter. “[Health insurers] corrupted the concept of managed care and turned it into something that has been really more of managing cost, but also depriving people of the care that they need. Insurers have figured out how to extract so much money out of what we spend as a nation on health care to reward their shareholders. There’s no other country in the world that has a system like this that enables middlemen to siphon off so much money from middle-class and working-class folks that need health care,” he added.

[Health insurers gave $120 billion to shareholders while denying your claim](https://click.actionnetwork.org/ss/c/u001.XaF8mXqsA6b2dSPmhsleMcWFw52Elreo3yWoFg6BtS2BeJHem7WE3EF8fNcR3033HbbqlU7O-3OmX7C_eZbnYdwY_DUka5gG6aLMG_c-mSm53s-g6ZcLVOsdi8FiLyQdJgAkKIk9TGsq9m-HV64Rk2CUPvHAmVB3S5uB3W05jlWYVT_gCkjAuYlHMwyrg7SY8e_ox8TyRwSitYZSz2Ye0VyKj_kypDWZ6Wr4nUHbB-5WCJ5K6SVf-i-tvvpz_W3_mpTxu31WvIlj-lBQlxHIxpkfsRBlRhuAJILB-Cqai0hx6PZfAezfrZ4acDucpn5XCZCfN_FsPBGEMW9xfxcLwtm1r3cjXofSZaPFtnQRtkZEsZ_6ZKjKuODWkpkhL-a8yrpytdsIPir3rn3EA9rFea5hCCODTFrHcvHpKL048SjKZm7xV2DBWx9bZhWSxsLs/4cb/lTGt4CHZSq-Qu8m6Ref8FA/h9/h001.lPYN2j4fOEyHeW9GYZIf9uCJvtlCG3SxI3g-Y4z8Jd4)