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Floridians enjoy a robust state economy and a low unemployment rate, but we're not immune from national trends that affect our lives and pocketbooks. Like those in other states, we face inflationary pressures, including high costs for prescription drugs. Thankfully, our governor and Legislature are not afraid to take on the powerful to do what is right, and on this issue the support came from both sides of the aisle.

While high drug costs are a national problem, we were able to act on the issue within the state by bringing much-needed reform to our drug pricing system. We zeroed in on the powerful interests that have an extraordinary amount of control on what we pay for our prescriptions and whether we have access to what our doctors want to

prescribe. One of the most important actions the Legislature took this year was addressing the role of pharmacy benefit managers, or PBMs.

PBMs were originally created to act as intermediaries between insurers, pharmacies, and drug manufacturers with the intention of negotiating rebates with the drug manufacturers and passing those cost savings benefits to patients. In this role, PBMs control which medications are covered by insurers and how much patients pay for them. To complicate matters a bit, some health insurance companies also act as their own pharmacy benefit manager and some even own mail-order and specialty pharmacies, operating in a vertically integrated fashion. This is far from the “middle-man” role as previously envisioned.

This conflict of interest gives PBMs a financial incentive to favor certain drugs over others, which ultimately leads to higher costs for patients and insurers and gives PBMs the ability to restrict patient access to certain drugs or pharmacies – a tactic known as “steering” patients to affiliated pharmacies and health insurers. PBMs are also known to require pharmacies to pay fees to participate in their networks, which can also lead to higher drug costs for patients. Keep in mind that most employers provide for health insurance coverage, and thus these rising costs are baked into a hidden tax on both small businesses and their employees.

With these powerful facts at our disposal, the Florida Legislature set out to halt these anti-consumer practices. The Prescription Drug Reform Act passed in the House and Senate with unanimous support and was swiftly signed by Gov. DeSantis. This legislation will empower patients through reduced drug costs and expanded choice by requiring greater transparency and accountability from PBMs. To stay up to date on the current pricing for specific drugs, patients can also now see reportable prescription drug price increases when shopping for their prescriptions on MyFloridaRX.com.

This legislation also takes bold steps to rein in unchecked PBM profiteering and to return prescription drug savings back to patients – sending a message that we won’t stand for predatory practices against Floridians. By eliminating the games PBMs play we will ensure our drug pricing system benefits our working-class families and senior population. We will continue to work in the interests of patients, making sure the medications they need are affordable and that large corporations aren’t getting between patients and their doctors. Patients should talk to their local pharmacist to see how these reforms could affect the price of their specific prescriptions.

Jason Brodeur is the state Senator for District 10, representing Seminole County and part of Orange County. He sponsored the Prescription Drug Reform Act, which was signed into law this year.