

Will CVS-Aetna merger mean cheaper health care?

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(HealthDay)—U.S. consumers stand to benefit from CVS Health's

planned purchase of insurance giant Aetna, executives from the two corporations say.

Other [health care](#) industry observers aren't so sure.

The \$69 billion deal was announced Sunday.

Merging CVS, which has 10,000 retail clinics and pharmacies, with Aetna means more [health services](#) will likely move out of doctors' offices to store-based providers across the nation.

Pharmacies already provide vaccinations and blood pressure checks. Now, they could offer one-stop shopping for insurance and certain diagnostic services.

On-site lab work and diabetes counseling are two other possibilities, said Larry Merlo, CVS Health president and CEO.

Customers should also expect lower prices, Merlo said.

"We know we can make [health](#) care more affordable and less expensive," Merlo told *The New York Times*. "We think of it as creating a new front door to health care in America."

But others aren't convinced this is a win-win for the general public. Some fear that less competition will drive up drug prices. Others worry that consumers insured by Aetna might be restricted in where they can get health care or fill prescriptions.

Mark Bertolini, Aetna's CEO, said the companies would not raise prices for consumers.

"It doesn't make sense for us to charge people more when we want more

people in the store," Bertolini told the *Times*. "CVS has the draw. People trust their pharmacist," he added.

But some critics predict the merger will run afoul of federal antitrust officials.

David Balto, an antitrust lawyer, told the *Times* that doctors may be in a better position to treat illness than retail executives.

"Who do you want to run the health care system?" he said.

Others, however, say there is no conflict since CVS and Aetna aren't in the same line of business.

The mammoth sale comes amid a rocky period in the U.S. health care landscape. Provisions of the Affordable Care Act remain in jeopardy, and potential tax cuts debated in Congress could affect out-of-pocket spending on insurance, drugs and medical care.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can help you prepare for a [doctor's visit](#).

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