

# PITTSBURGH BUSINESS TIMES

## 2021 OUTSTANDING CEOS AND TOP EXECUTIVES



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ell before the rest of western Pennsylvania started to grapple with the life-altering reality that was the Covid-19 pandemic, Highmark Health President and CEO David Holmberg had assembled his team and started making preparations for whatever was to come.

Holmberg leads a \$21 billion organization that sits at a major confluence of the pandemic: It's not only a Blue Cross Blue Shield plan in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Delaware and now northwestern New York — with a national health insurance and dental insurance business — but it also owns the 14-hospital Allegheny Health Network. It has more than 37,000 employees, many in the Pittsburgh region, and more than 6 million members.

And Holmberg, staring down the biggest challenge in the company's history, was determined to protect its members, employees and its regions.

"We set some ground rules. We were going to protect the people we serve; we were going to protect our own teams, our clinicians and everybody; and we were going to deliver," Holmberg said. "We weren't going to miss a beat."

He launched a massive effort from the early days of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, with teams figuring out all they could about the virus and what it might do to the region, getting ready with the supplies and the clinicians and staff that would face overwhelming conditions and setting up the varied business for the health and economic shocks the pandemic would cause.

"What was becoming very clear (early on) was that we needed to take action. We needed to be decisive. This was going to be probably the most challenging event this region has had to deal with in a generation, and we couldn't quit, we couldn't run," Holmberg said. "We needed to dig in and figure out solutions."

**Title:** President and CEO, Highmark Health

**Residence:** Downtown Pittsburgh

**Age:** 62

**Hobbies:** Running

**Family:** Wife, Kim; two sons

**Education:** MBA, finance, The University of Texas at Dallas School of Management; AMP, international/global studies, Harvard Business School

**Boards:** Chairman, Blue Cross Blue Shield Association and America's Health Insurance Plans, Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Pittsburgh Cultural Trust

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Holmberg is one of the most recognizable business leaders in the region, but he's also one of the most humble. He's never been about the personal credit and said that the success Highmark Health and AHN had in the pandemic was due to a team effort from everyone.

"I'm very fortunate that we have a team that was battle tested," he said. "We've gone through a lot together as an organization; we've learned how to get things done, adapt and adjust in an environment that is rapidly changing."

What Highmark Health went through is breathtaking: Not only did it take a massive effort since early 2020 to serve its patients, both with Covid and with other ailments, through successive waves of the pandemic, but it also had to protect its staff, particularly at AHN on the front lines, from the virus. It also, in just four days, sent much of its office staff, save for a core group of managers, home to work remotely.

It reached partnerships at various stages of the pandemic, including with MSA Safety Inc. in an innovative collaboration to create personal protective equipment. Those partnerships accelerated in early 2021 with what was another big effort for Highmark Health and AHN, the mass distribution of hundreds of thousands of doses of Covid-19 vaccine, not only in the Pittsburgh region, but also in Erie. It worked with the Pittsburgh Pirates, Eat'n Park, PNC Financial Services Group Inc., the Hillman Family Foundations, the Richard King Mellon Foundation, The Pittsburgh Foundation and Dick's Sporting Goods Inc., among many others, to distribute vaccines.

"Everyone stepped up and wanted to be part of the solution," Holmberg said.

Yet what else is striking about Highmark Health during the pandemic is that it didn't miss a beat in running the other parts of the business. It unveiled and completed a major affiliation with HealthNow, the owner of two Blue Cross Blue Shield plans in New York, which expanded the company's reach to another state. It reached deals with Google Cloud and Verily on its massive, state-of-the-art care initiative called Living Health, and it forged a joint venture on data and best care practices with a Delaware health system. It announced that it had acquired the 50% ownership stake in Gateway Health that it didn't own. In July, Highmark Health also launched a new consultancy, called Lumevity, that seeks to help businesses inside and out of health care with change and transformation. That's not to mention the expansion of AHN to include four neighborhood hospitals that opened during the pandemic, and the September opening of AHN Wexford Hospital.

"I'm very proud that as an organization, we've stayed on mission, we've been strategic, we've understood that in the long term, there were things that we needed to do to serve the people who have the confidence and trust in us," he said.

*- Paul J. Gough*