



Specialty medication adherence: A payer's guide

**Proven strategies to lower costs
and enhance patient outcomes.**





Health plans are under *mounting pressure* to control costs and deliver better outcomes.

Yet when members don't take their medications as prescribed, it costs the system over \$500 billion a year—driven largely by preventable complications.¹

Payers today face a range of complex challenges, including rising healthcare costs, an aging population, fragmented systems, and limited access to care. While advances in medicine and technology have led to breakthrough treatments, they often come with high costs. The aging U.S. population is also increasing pressure on the healthcare system to address more complex and chronic care needs, making it difficult for payers to coordinate care, manage costs, and improve health outcomes for their members.

In this environment, medication adherence becomes even more critical, as non-adherence can exacerbate chronic conditions, lead to higher healthcare costs, and ultimately hinder efforts to provide effective care.

Patient challenges are payer challenges.

Your members can face numerous barriers when it comes to staying on track with their medications. They may forget doses, misunderstand instructions, or stop taking a therapy if they don't see immediate results. The complexity of specialty medication regimens and high costs may also lead patients to stop taking medications. If patients don't feel supported due to communication gaps with their healthcare providers, they're also more likely to struggle with staying on track. Addressing these varied challenges requires personalized solutions that meet each patient's unique needs.

Walgreens helps plans turn this challenge into opportunity. As the nation's largest independent specialty pharmacy,² Walgreens combines high-touch clinical management programs that unlock incremental savings, affordability solutions, and data-driven engagement to improve adherence where it matters most. Our approach goes beyond medication dispensing. We focus on closing care gaps, optimizing outcomes, and reducing overall medical costs through targeted, data-driven support.



50%

50% of U.S. prescription drug spending goes to specialty drugs.³



50%

Some 50% of Americans don't take their medications for chronic conditions as prescribed.⁴



\$500B

Medication non-adherence contributes to \$500 billion in unnecessary health costs annually.⁵

¹Wilkins K. Medication adherence is not a zero-sum game. *Am J Manag Care*. October 8, 2020. <https://www.ajmc.com/view/contributor-medication-adherence-is-not-a-zero-sum-game>.

²Defined by FY24 revenue and lack of PBM ownership.

³Biggs S, Long D. Insights into the 2023 U.S. pharmaceutical market. IQVIA. July 25, 2023. Accessed May 13, 2025. <https://www.iqvia.com/locations/united-states/blogs/2023/07/insights-into-the-2023-us-pharmaceutical-market>.

⁴Feng L, Singh T, Rudkin K, Emmons S, Groves, E, Kirkham H, Smith-Ray R. Pharmacist-led intervention is associated with improved medication adherence in older adults with common chronic conditions. *AMCP* April 2024.

⁵Watanabe, J. H., McInnis, T., & Hirsch, J. D. (2018). Cost of prescription drug-related morbidity and mortality. *Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, 52(9), 829-837.



The role of specialty pharmacy in driving adherence.

Specialty pharmacies like Walgreens play a critical role in managing complex therapies, going far beyond dispensing medications. Pharmacists are often the last healthcare professionals to see a patient before they start a therapy, making it an ideal opportunity to support adherence from the get-go.

Our specialized pharmacists and extensive network provide timely and convenient access to medications and proactively engage patients through trusted interactions. Walgreens pharmacy teams serve as connectors between patients, caregivers, providers, and payers, identifying and addressing adherence issues early and effectively.



78%

of the U.S. population lives within **5 miles** of a Walgreens.



275+

community-based specialty pharmacies located near healthcare providers.



5 centralized specialty pharmacies offering nationwide reach.



20+

disease- or product-specific programs to address adherence barriers.



Personalized strategies to improve adherence.

Walgreens delivers proven solutions that tackle adherence barriers head-on—combining clinical support, cost navigation, and digital tools to improve outcomes and reduce overall spend.

● Enhanced clinical management

Walgreens pharmacists play a hands-on role in supporting therapy adherence. They monitor patient progress, help manage side effects, and stay in close communication with providers to address issues before they disrupt treatment. Our clinical management programs help manage costs and drive better outcomes through tools like stockpile prevention, dose optimization, and split fills to control pharmacy spend.

● Whole-patient care

Our expert pharmacists and nurses provide personalized education from the start of therapy through ongoing treatment. With deep experience in oncology, HIV, fertility, autoimmune diseases, and bleeding disorders, they offer nutritional, emotional, and clinical support to help patients understand their medications, manage side effects, and navigate complex treatment with confidence.

● Financial assistance coordination

We help reduce cost-related barriers by proactively connecting members to copay assistance and foundation support programs. By reducing cost-related abandonment, plans avoid the scenario where a member's condition worsens because they couldn't pay for treatment.

● Personalized digital support

We empower patients to stay on track with their treatments through support from our app, telephonic outreach, and secure digital access to pharmacists.



Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy consistently delivers impactful results for plan sponsors.

94%

adherence to specialty medications.⁵

95%

patient adherence to oncology medications.⁶

93%

adherence rate among multiple sclerosis (MS) patients.⁷

⁵ At central specialty locations. Walgreens internal data, CY2024.

⁶+ Among patients in our Connected Care cystic fibrosis program.

⁷ Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy internal data, April–June 2024. Measured with PDC.



Research: Better adherence pays off for health plans.

Supporting patients with adherence-focused solutions—

like Walgreens Connected Care®—can help health plans reduce avoidable costs, improve outcomes, and enhance the member experience. A recent study analyzing external data highlights the cost and care burden of non-adherence to oral oncolytic medications for cancer:

\$19K

in annual savings per adherent patient by avoiding the higher medical costs associated with non-adherence—even after accounting for increased medication spend.

~2X

hospitalization rate for nonadherent patients vs. adherent peers.

1.7

more hospital days per admission for nonadherent patients.



Improving adherence to specialty drugs isn't just good care—it's smart strategy. Partner with Walgreens Specialty Pharmacy to drive better outcomes and significant savings for your health plan.

Connect with our team today:



Reach us at connect@walgreens.com



Explore more payer solutions at <https://www.walgreensspecialtyrx.com/payers>

Staskon F, Khan K, Pfeifer A, Havern, L. Hematological oral oncolytics: Adherence, healthcare cost and utilization. Presented at the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy Nexus 2024 Annual Conference (AMCP Nexus 2024) October 14-17, 2024, in Las Vegas, NV.

