

Mail-Service Pharmacies Are Safe and Provide Cost-Effective Patient Services

What Is a Mail-Service Pharmacy?

Many pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) operate mail-service pharmacies, which are a convenient option for patients to have their prescriptions delivered safely and securely, straight to their doors. Here's how they work:



The patient goes to their local drugstore for a new prescription



The patient fills several 30-day prescriptions at the local drugstore



Once stabilized, the patient will use home delivery for maintenance drugs

Mail-Service Pharmacies Enhance Patient Access to Medications and Care Management.

- Pharmacists and customer service representatives are available to help patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can counsel patients on affordable medication options and answer any questions they have concerning their prescription.
- For vulnerable populations like the homebound and elderly, mail-service pharmacies provide a convenient way to access medications. Translation services are available in many languages and accessibility options are available for the hearing impaired.
- The technological and workflow advances in mail-service pharmacies allow pharmacists to focus on clinical management, rather than basic prescription processing.

Mail-Service Pharmacies Put Patient Safety First and Improve Health Outcomes.

- Before any prescription is dispensed and shipped, mail-service pharmacies electronically screen the patient's comprehensive prescription profile to detect any potentially harmful drug reactions and interactions—even when the consumer has previously used several pharmacies or seen multiple providers.
- A seminal study by the U.S. Department of Defense found that highly automated mail-service pharmacies dispensed prescriptions **with 23-times greater accuracy than retail pharmacies**. The mail-service error rate was zero in several of the most critical areas, including dispensing the correct drug, dosage, and dosage form.¹
- A 2014 *Health Affairs* study found that patients who received their medications through home delivery were more likely to adhere to their prescribed regimen and experience improved health outcomes, preventing extra visits to the doctor's office and unnecessary emergency room visits.²

The Bottom Line: Patients Benefit from Mail-Service Pharmacies.

- Mail-service pharmacies are able to generate significant savings for consumers and payers because of their unmatched efficiency compared to brick-and-mortar pharmacies. Payers choose to have mail-service pharmacies as a part of their pharmacy networks.
- Mail-service pharmacies are able to keep prescription drug costs down because they have greater efficiency and lower overhead costs than retail pharmacies. Through the use of computer-controlled quality processes, robotic dispensing machinery, and advanced workflow practices, mail-service pharmacies are able to fill large quantities of prescriptions—improving quality and reducing costs.
- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) studied drug costs at retail and mail-service pharmacies. **The CMS study showed that drug costs were 16 percent lower at mail-service pharmacies compared to brick-and-mortar drug stores.**³
- Health plans and PBMs often incentivize patients to use mail-service pharmacies by providing lower copayment options for 90-day supplies of maintenance medications.
- Mail-service pharmacies promote the use of generic drugs, which are equally effective as brand medications but have lower copays. **Research shows that the generic substitution rate is higher for mail-service pharmacies compared to retail drugstores, which translates into lower costs for payers and lower overall benefit costs.**⁴
- In addition to cost savings, research shows that patients who receive their medications by mail adhered to their prescribed regimen more often than those who picked up their medications from a traditional drugstore. Medication adherence leads to reductions in other healthcare spending, like extra visits to the doctor and re-hospitalizations.⁵
- Restrictions on the use of mail-service pharmacies take choices away from patients and force one-size-fits-all copayments.

¹ Office of the Inspector General, Department of Defense. (2013). *TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy Program Was Cost Efficient and Adequate Dispensing Controls Were in Place*, available at: <http://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/1118953/the-tricare-mail-order-program-was-cost-efficient-and-adequate-dispensing-contr/>.

² Niteesh K. Choudry et al. (March 2014). *Health Affairs*. "Five Features Of Value-Based Insurance Design Plans Were Associated With Higher Rates Of Medication Adherence."

³ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. (December 2013). "Part D Claims Analysis: Negotiated Pricing Between General Mail Order and Retail Pharmacies," available at: <https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Prescription-DrugCoverage/PrescriptionDrugCovGenIn/Downloads/Negotiated-Pricing-Between-General-Mail-Order-and-RetailPharmaciesDec92013.pdf>.

⁴ Visante. (2014). "Mail and Specialty Savings," available at: <https://www.pcmanet.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/visante-pcma-ca-mail-specialty-savings.pdf>.

⁵ OK Duru et al. (2010). *The American Journal of Managed Care*. "Mail-Order Pharmacy Use and Adherence to Diabetes-Related Medications."