

Rising Medication Prices in Pakistan: A Growing Concern for Regular Treatment Adherence

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Access to affordable medication is essential for effective healthcare, particularly for chronic illness management. However, recent price increases in Pakistan threaten this access, raising concerns about adherence to treatment.¹ Cost-related medication non-adherence is the inability to follow prescribed medication regimens due to financial constraints. Key predictors include high out-of-pocket costs, limited financial resources, lack of insurance, younger age, and poorer health. Cost-related medication non-adherence is a major barrier to effective treatment, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan, where reliance on out-of-pocket spending for medications is prevalent compared to developed nations with comprehensive healthcare systems.² The availability and high cost of essential medicines remain significant barriers, affecting many low-income patients. These medicines are vital for meeting healthcare needs, as highlighted by Sustainable Development Goal 3.8, which emphasizes the need for accessibility to safe and affordable medications and vaccines for all. Ensuring sufficient access to medications is crucial for improving patients' quality of life.³

It was reported in the Daily Dawn newspaper of 10 November, 2025 by the Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on National Health Services, that since the caretaker government deregulated non-essential medicines in February 2024, there has been an overall 32% increase in medicine prices. In some instances, prices have doubled, with a 50% increase noted in several cases.⁴ However, the Pakistan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association (PPMA) contends that the average increase is about 15 percent, attributing this discrepancy to inflation and higher production costs. This rise has sparked public outrage and surprised authorities who had anticipated that deregulation would enhance competition and lower costs.⁴

Rising medication costs have notably affected patients reliant on long-term treatments. This situation jeopardizes medication adherence for individuals with chronic

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diseases, potentially leading to serious health complications, due to missing doses, minimizing frequency or sometimes abandoning treatment due to higher costs. With many households already grappling with economic challenges, the affordability of medicines has emerged as an urgent public health issue.⁵ The government should reinstate and enhance regulatory oversight of essential medicines to prevent unjustified price increases. Transparent pricing mechanisms for pharmaceutical companies should be established along with publication of regular drug price updates. The Essential Medicines List should be revised to include more chronic-disease medications. Strict price caps should be enforced to eliminate financial barriers for patients, and provide incentives to boost local manufacturing. Subsidy schemes for low-income patients needing lifelong treatments should be implemented and their access expanded through programmes as the sehat-card. Educational campaigns on the safety and efficacy of generics are essential along with offering incentives on their prescriptions and ensuring strict quality control. If this action is not implemented, the patients will suffer especially the population of the lower income group and the industry of fake drug manufacturers will bloom.

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