

Drug Shortages Policy Solutions: Saving Lives and Dollars

The Problem

Persistent **drug shortages put patient safety at risk** when the only options are to ration, skip, or delay doses of therapies or utilize a less effective or safe alternative treatment – if there is one.

The process to find and procure an alternative drug also **results in significant economic costs to healthcare systems**. The American Hospital Association estimates that hospitals spend at least \$359 million in extra labor costs annually to do so.

The Issue

Drug shortages compromise access to care and add significant costs on patients, families, providers, hospitals and the healthcare system at-large.

Drug shortages have long jeopardized patient care, reaching an all-time high in early 2024 - with a reported 323 drugs in active shortage. Between 2023 and 2024, it was estimated that more than half a million cancer patients were impacted by the shortage of platinum-based chemotherapy drugs, several of which are essential in treating urologic cancers. Most recently, manufacturing delays caused by hurricane damages resulted in shortages of critical and life-saving IV fluids.

Whether caused by high demand, manufacturing or supply chain issues, or natural disasters, drug shortages make treatment issues difficult for both physicians and patients.

A comprehensive and coordinated systemic effort is needed to address both short-term and long-term needs, however, there are steps we can take now.

The Solutions

Establish a vulnerable medicines list:

As a first step, Congress should establish a vulnerable medicines list. This list would reflect conditions that may increase the risk that a medicine could go into shortage and serve as a part of - or in addition to - FDA's Essential Medicines List.

We encourage Congress to work with stakeholders, including doctors, patients and health systems, on short and long term policy solutions.

Facts

1 in 10

cancer patients are affected, facing treatment delays & difficulty finding substitute medication

\$359 million

in extra hospital labor costs are caused by drug shortages annually