

An Employer's Guide to Medication Adherence



Six in ten Americans live with at least one chronic illness including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis, and cancer. Risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and tobacco use, all of which can be managed with medication. Individuals that do not have their chronic illness under control, are unaware of it, or are not taking medications as prescribed, face higher risks of morbidity and mortality.

Fact: 50% of medications for chronic illness are not taken as prescribed.

What is medication adherence?

Medication adherence refers to whether an individual takes their medications as prescribed. People struggle with medication adherence primarily due to costs, concerns about side effects, concerns about safety, and overall medication burden.

Adherence includes:

- Getting prescriptions filled and refilled
- Taking the correct dose
- Taking medications on time
- Following directions regarding frequency and duration

Why should medication adherence matter to employers?

Medication adherence can improve worker health and well-being, increase productivity, and save money. The cost of nonadherence is high. Medication nonadherence is associated with increased hospitalization rates and emergency department visits, higher mortality rates, worse health outcomes, and increased downstream costs, all of which impose avoidable and substantial healthcare costs on employers. People taking medications for multiple conditions, and individuals with complex medication regimens, are at an increased risk for nonadherence.

By promoting medication adherence, employers can:

- Support worker health and well-being
- Reduce sick days
- Cut medical costs
- Decrease hospitalizations and emergency room visits
- Increase productivity
- Support workers in performing their assigned job duties

Strategies for Employers

Look at the Data

Review aggregate healthcare and pharmacy claims and cost data to understand the scope of the problem and identify illnesses with highest costs.

Medical Plan

- Reduce or eliminate co-pays for chronic disease medications
- Promote pharmacy comparison tools
- Provide medication discount cards and information on drug assistance programs
- Increase access to medications in partnership with pharmacy vendors

Education & Training

- Host educational forums and training for employees on the importance of medication adherence and provide resources as follow-up
- Incentivize employees to practice self-management of blood pressure, enroll in tobacco cessation programs, and have a healthy body of any size
- Provide employees with a list of questions and concerns they can ask their provider when they are prescribed new medications

Communication

- Encourage employees to enroll in medication reminder programs based on their communication preferences
- Distribute materials on simple ways employees can improve medication adherence (e.g., flyers, payroll inserts, email messages, newsletters, etc.)

References

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[Prevalence and Persistence of Cost-Related Medication Nonadherence Among Medicare Beneficiaries at High Risk of Hospitalization](#). (2021). JAMA Netw Open. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.0498.

