

Exploring the Community Pharmacy Structure in Nigeria



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Key takeaways:

- The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) is the central regulatory body in Nigeria. It is responsible for drug, food, and cosmetic approvals.
- There is a national health insurance system. As of 2022, only a handful of Nigerians are insured. But, legislation passed in May 2022 aims to change this situation.
- Pharmacy education in Nigeria includes much of the same coursework as the U.S. And to become licensed, students must also complete an internship, similar to clinical rotations in the U.S.



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Community pharmacies are those that dispense medications to patients who aren't hospitalized or in nursing facilities. This series explores how community pharmacy practice differs around the world. In doing so, it gives us the opportunity to view our own system in a new light and potentially find opportunities for improvement.

We've covered the globe, exploring the practice of pharmacy in countries across continents, from [Japan](#) and [Australia](#) to [Argentina](#) and [Finland](#). However, to date we've covered only two African countries: [Malawi](#) and [Egypt](#). Here, we'll expand on that by looking at community pharmacy practice in Nigeria.

To help us better understand pharmacy practice there, we interviewed Atai Okokon, a pharmacist who graduated from the [University of Lagos Faculty of Pharmacy](#) and from the University of Oxford with a Master of Science in [global health science and epidemiology](#). She worked as a pharmacist and public health analyst in Nigeria for close to 10 years.

How Nigeria's pharmacy system works

Health insurance

The [National Health Insurance Scheme](#) (NHIS) is a public program that provides access to healthcare for all Nigerians. But as of 2021, only a [small percentage](#) of Nigerians were covered by insurance, mostly through employer-based programs.

According to Mrs. Okokon, this has caused many preventable deaths because of a lack of access to quality medications. In fact, a [survey](#) published in 2018 also found that it has led to financial strain and poverty for many households. Mrs. Okokon also notes that the few patients who can afford their medications use it at hospitals.

Landmark legislation, however, could change this situation.

In May 2022, the government passed the [National Health Insurance Authority \(NHIA\) Act](#). The act makes health insurance mandatory for all Nigerians and establishes the [Vulnerable Group Fund](#) for those who can't pay for insurance. The federal government will work with local state health insurance agencies and contributions will come from local, state, and federal governments.

Outcomes

Nigeria's annual healthcare spending in [2019](#) was \$71 USD per person ([3% of GDP](#)). This is far lower than the U.S., which spent [\\$12,530 per person \(19.7% of GDP\)](#) on healthcare in 2020, according to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. For comparison, [Malawi](#), another African country we've covered, spends a little over [7% of GDP](#). This is despite [Nigeria](#) having a far higher per-capita GDP than [Malawi](#).

Nigeria's under-5 mortality rate, a key indicator of health-system performance, was almost [114 per 1,000 live births in 2020](#). This is the [second-highest rate in the world](#). [Malawi](#) has an under-5 mortality rate of [38.6 per 1,000 live births](#). The U.S. sits at [6.3 per 1,000 live births](#), which still lags behind many other developed countries, including [Finland](#) and [Japan](#).

Life expectancy in Nigeria, another key indicator of health-system performance, was [55 years](#) in 2020, compared to [77 years](#) the same year in the U.S. This is also the [second-lowest rate](#) in the world, after the Central African Republic at 54 years.

According to the CDC, the top [causes of death](#) in Nigeria are neonatal disorders, malaria, diarrheal diseases, lower respiratory infections, and HIV/AIDS.

Pharmacy regulation

The [National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control](#) (NAFDAC) regulates the approval and marketing of drugs, foods, cosmetics, as well as clinical trials. They also issue [recalls](#) and conduct [post-marketing surveillance](#) of approved products.

The [National Drug Law Enforcement Agency](#) (NDLEA) handles narcotic and illegal drug trafficking and control, like the Drug Enforcement Administration in the U.S. Finally, the [Federal Ministry of Health](#) is the primary public health body in the nation.

However, there is no regulation of [drug pricing](#) in Nigeria. Mrs. Okokon states that prices vary among both wholesalers and retail pharmacies. And these prices can be higher in areas with higher rent and overhead.

Finally, the [Pharmacists Council of Nigeria](#) is responsible for the accreditation of pharmacy schools. As of 2022, there are 20 [accredited](#) schools of pharmacy in Nigeria. They are also [responsible](#) for the [licensing](#) of pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, pharmacies, wholesalers, and manufacturers.

Daily pharmacy practice in Nigeria

According to Mrs. Okokon, most pharmacies in Nigeria are independently owned and are located inside malls and department stores. Unlike the U.S., though, those pharmacies are not typically owned by the department store.

There isn't a process for billing and reimbursement because the vast majority of people are uninsured and pay cash for their prescriptions. Also, vaccines are not generally given in community pharmacies, but rather in hospitals.

Pharmacists cannot yet prescribe independently or through a collaborative practice agreement. But, a [2018 survey](#) found strong support among pharmacists for giving them that authority. And though medication reviews are uncommon, Mrs. Okokon notes that informal medication reviews and discussions based on information available to pharmacists are common. This is because pharmacists are accessible, while access to health services can be difficult.

The [curriculum](#) for pharmacy schools in Nigeria looks similar to many schools in the U.S., with courses in basic sciences (like chemistry, biology, and math) and clinical and research sciences (like human physiology, pharmaceutics, and pharmacology).

Notably, there is a required course in entrepreneurship, which has also gained popularity in the U.S., with [Mercer University](#) even offering an entrepreneurship track.

After graduation, pharmacists must complete a 1-year [internship program](#) supervised by a registered pharmacist. And to renew their registration, all pharmacists must complete the [Mandatory Continuing Professional Development Programme](#).

USAID in Nigeria

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is working — along with many other governmental and non-governmental agencies — to improve the situation in Nigeria.

Through the [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief](#) (PEPFAR), [over 600,000 Nigerians](#), or 90% of the population with HIV, are receiving HIV therapy.

Another USAID initiative, the U.S. President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), aims to combat malaria, the second leading cause of death in the country. The initiative has led to a 36% drop in malaria parasites found in children under 5. It also helped improve maternal and child health as well as tuberculosis care.

The bottom line

Nigeria has both a regulatory system and pharmacy education and licensing system in place to make sure its residents and citizens have access to safe and quality medications. And while it does face challenges in healthcare delivery and access, the National Health Insurance Scheme should greatly improve care after it is fully implemented.

Despite these obstacles, pharmacists in Nigeria are well-educated and equipped to handle their country's healthcare needs. And, like in many countries, they are in a good position to fill in gaps in healthcare, especially in rural areas.

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