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# KHC Office Hours

## Bridging the Gap: Tackling Pharmacy Deserts & Enhancing Medication Access and Adherence

### July 22, 2025


**Tessa Schnelle, PharmD, MPH, DPLA**  
**Immediate Past President – Kansas Pharmacists Association**



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### Today’s Webinar Agenda

- Welcome – 5 mins
- Content Presentation 45 mins
- Q&A 5 Mins
- Closing Comments 2 mins

# AGENDA






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# Bridging the Gap: Tackling Pharmacy Deserts & Enhancing Medication Access and Adherence

Tessa Schnelle, PharmD, MPH, DPLA

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## Objectives

- Describe the role of the Pharmacy Benefits Manager
- Define the term pharmacy desert
- Understand the differences between medication access & adherence
- Identify risk factors that have unique impacts on patients and rural Kansas communities
- Differentiate between causal theories contribute to the increase in pharmacy deserts
- Assess solutions addressing barriers to medication access.

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Background

What is the role of the Pharmacy Benefits Manager (PBM) in medication access in the United States?

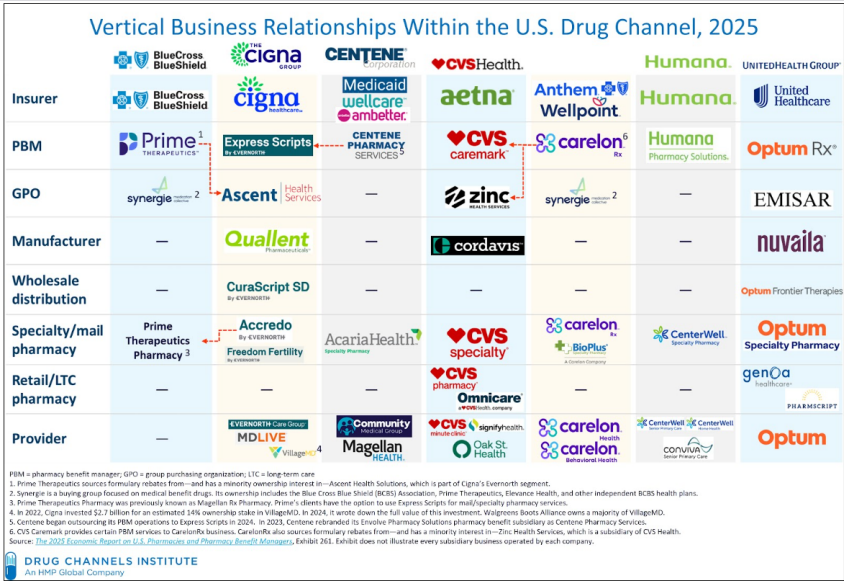


FIG. A1. The 2025 Economic Report on U.S. Pharmacies and Pharmacy Benefit Managers, Drug Channels Institute, 2025.

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Senate Financial Institutions and Insurance Hears Updates from Pharmacists

(Feb. 5, 2025) – Today, the Senate Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee, chaired by Senator Brenda Dietrich (R-Topeka), heard from Sloane Freeman, an independent pharmacy owner in South Central Kansas. Freeman discussed the pharmacist's roles in overall patient care and the connection to community support.

Tessa Schnelle, a hospital pharmacist who serves both a health system and a rural hospital, gave an overview of how the pharmacy industry has evolved over the last decade. She reported that 52 pharmacies have had to close and Kansas pharmacies are at higher risk than other states nationally. She highlighted pharmacy deserts and their connection to other health care shortage areas.

Feeling sick? In parts of Kansas, you'll have a hard time finding a pharmacy

KCUR | By Bek Shackelford-Nwanganga

Published February 6, 2024 at 3:00 AM CST

Independent pharmacies in Kansas are closing. Those remaining say they're fighting to stay open.

KMUW | By Celia Hack

Published February 2, 2024 at 12:00

Pharmacy deserts are increasing around the country

March 01, 2024 | By Bek Shackelford-Nwanganga, Kansas News Service

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### FTC Releases Interim Staff Report on Prescription Drug Middlemen

Report details how prescription drug middleman profit at the expense of patients by inflating drug costs and squeezing Main Street pharmacies

July 9, 2024

Parent/Owner	CVS Health Corporation	The Cigna Group	UnitedHealth Group Inc.	Humana Inc.	MedImpact Holdings Inc.	19 BlueCross BlueShield plans
Drug Private Labeler	Cordavis Limited	Qualient Pharmaceuticals	NUVAILA			
Health Care Provider	MinuteClinic, Signify Health	Evernorth Care Group	Optum Health	CenterWell		
Pharmacy Benefit Manager	34%	23%	22%	7%	5%	3%
"PBM GPO"/ Rebate Aggregator	Zinc Health Services	Ascent Health Services	Emisar Pharma Services	Ascent (via contract)	Prescient Holdings Group LLC	Ascent (minority owner)
Pharmacy - Retail	CVS Pharmacy					
Pharmacy - Mail Order	CVS Caremark Mail Service Pharmacy	Express Scripts Pharmacy	Optum Rx Mail Service Pharmacy	CenterWell Pharmacy	Birdi, Inc.	Express Scripts Pharmacy (via contract)
Pharmacy - Specialty	CVS Specialty Pharmacy	Accredo	Optum Specialty Pharmacy	CenterWell Specialty Pharmacy	Specialty by Birdi	Accredo (via contract)
Health Insurer	Aetna	Cigna Healthcare	UnitedHealthcare	Humana		19 BlueCross BlueShield plans

FTC Releases Interim Staff Report on Prescription Drug Middlemen. Federal Trade Commission. July 9, 2024.

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## Pharmacy Desert vs Network Adequacy

### Pharmacy Desert:

A pharmacy shortage area where the distance to a pharmacy is greater than 10 miles in a rural area, 2 miles in a suburban area, 1 mile for urban areas and a half-mile in neighborhoods that are low income and have low vehicle ownership.

### Network Adequacy:

Is a regulatory measure used to ensure that health plans network contains an adequate number of providers to provide medically necessary services and access in a timely manner.

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How far is too far to travel?



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Medication Access vs Medication Adherence

**Medication Access:**

The ability for a patient to get the correct medication for their healthcare needs, at a price that they can afford and in adequate quantities.

**Common barriers to medication access include:** navigating insurance, medication costs, and physical access to medications.

**Medication Adherence:**

The extent to which a person's behavior corresponds with taking a medicine optimally.

**Common barriers to medication adherence include:** fear, cost, misunderstanding, polypharmacy, lack of symptoms, mistrust, worry, depression.

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Which of these methods of medication delivery is better equipped to provide medication access and adherence?



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What happens in a pharmacy desert when there is a medical emergency?



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What are the  
impacts of  
pharmacy deserts in  
Kansas?



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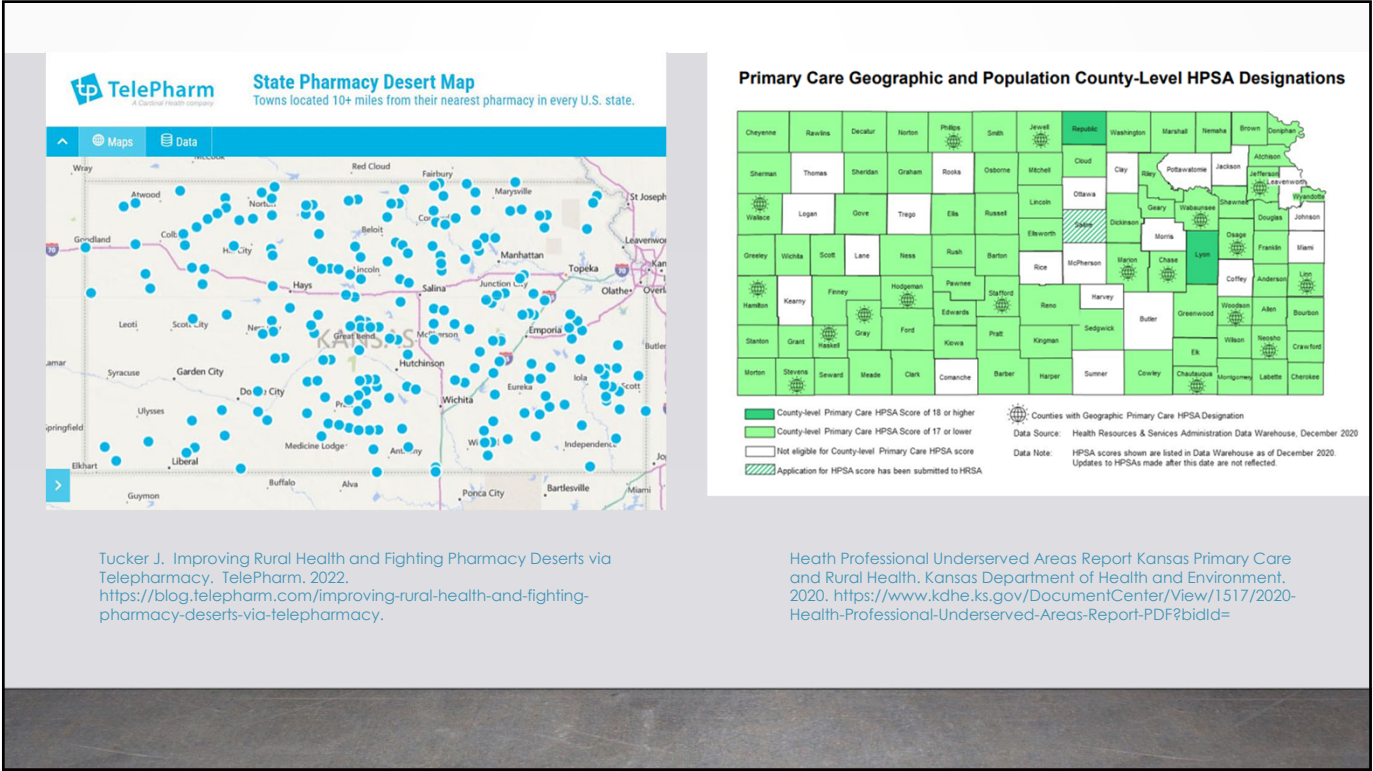


Research Questions

- What is the current state of pharmacy deserts in rural Kansas?
- What are the risk factors that have unique impacts on patients and rural communities designated as pharmacy deserts?
- What are the causal factors contributing to the development of pharmacy deserts?
- What solutions are being taken to increase medication access in rural areas?

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Results

- As of February 2024, **210 towns** in Kansas that **met the criteria of a rural pharmacy desert**.
- The **furthest distance** a town was from their nearest pharmacy was Matfield, Kansas, **25 miles from their local pharmacy**.
- The **average number of miles** between a town classified as a pharmacy desert and their pharmacy was **13.3 miles**.
- Of the 63 **Governor designated medically underserved areas (MUA)** in Kansas a total of **73% contained at least one pharmacy desert**.
- Approximately **58% of the pharmacy deserts** in Kansas **are located in a MUA**.
- Approximately **83% of the pharmacy deserts** in Kansas **are located in a Primary Care Health Provider Shortage Area (HPSA)**.

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2015-2025 Pharmacy Closure Trends in Kansas



Sorry We're  
CLOSED

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Causal Factors

*“We often preoccupy ourselves with the symptoms, whereas if we went to the root cause of the problems, we would be able to overcome the problems once and for all.”*

Wangari Maathai

BELL'S FAMILY PHARMACY CLOSES IN TATE, GEORGIA JUST AS PRICING DISPARITIES IN STATE HEALTH BENEFIT PLAN DISCOVERED



- Bell's Family Pharmacy (pictured above) in Tate, Georgia closed its doors on February 17, 2024, citing low reimbursements and other PBM practices as the primary cause. It was the only stand-alone retail pharmacy in the town.
- Bell's closure is part of a disturbing pattern of independent pharmacy closures over the last several years including Arnold's Drug Co. (Connelia), Concord Pharmacy (Dunwoody), Suvance Pharmacy, Jones Pharmacy (Fayetteville), Randy's Pharmacy (Helen), Clarksdale Drugs, Scottie Discount Drugs (Hartwell), Scottie Discount Drugs (Waycross), Prescription Shop (Statesboro), Medical Center Pharmacy (Fayetteville), Larry's Pharmacy (Waycross), and more.
- Despite offering high touch clinical and personalized service, GA independent pharmacies continue to suffer at the hands of large PBMs including low and underwater reimbursements in Georgia's State Health Benefit Plan.
- The below chart illustrates pricing disparities between independent pharmacies and chains in GA's SHBP.<sup>1</sup> These examples are of 15 commonly prescribed generics used to treat a wide variety of health conditions. These examples are no aberration but part of a pattern in which the SHBP's PBM pays independent pharmacies less than larger retail chain pharmacies.

15 Commonly Prescribed Generics Drug Name/Strength	Average Payment to 3 Closest Retail Chains <sup>2</sup>	Bell's Family Pharmacy Payment	Chain Payment v. Bell's % Difference
Atorvastatin Cal 20mg 90-day	\$46.87	\$1.90	2,387% higher
Bupropion Hydro ER (XL) 300mg 90-day	\$53.75	\$5.54	879% higher
Metformin Hydro ER 500mg 90-day	\$13.40	\$1.29	939% higher
Metoprolol Tartrate 100mg 90-day	\$23.89	\$14.44	65% higher
Amikodone Benzoate 10mg 90-day	\$23.55	\$1.51	1,460% higher
Levodopa/Carbidopa 100mg/90-day	\$4.00	\$4.39	10% (Bell's higher)
Lisinopril 20mg tablet 90-day	\$9.71	\$1.72	464% higher
Losartan Pot 50mg 90-day	\$41.44	\$4.74	774% higher
Omeprazole DR 10mg 90-day	\$102.85	\$66.59	54% higher
Esomeprazole Mag 20mg 90-day	\$61.68	\$32.66	89% higher
Simvastatin 20mg 90-day	\$30.00	\$7.50	300% higher
Mometasone Nasal 50mcg 90-day	\$45.38	\$23.58	92% higher
Ezetimibe/Statins 20mg/90-day	\$55.10	\$9.01	512% higher
Torsemide 50mg 90-day	\$62.13	\$15.16	310% higher
Cephalexin 500mg 7-day	\$12.63	\$2.05	516% higher

PLEASE STAND WITH GA'S INDEPENDENT PHARMACIES' & SUPPORT LEGISLATION TO FIX SHBP RX BENEFITS, END PBM PRICING GAMES, PAY ALL PHARMACIES FAIRLY & TRANSPARENTLY, & SAVE GA MONEY

<sup>1</sup> Pricing Source: <https://www.independentpharmacies.org/shbp-mno>  
<sup>2</sup> Estimated average payment calculated using pricing source for Walgreens, Kroger, and CVS retail pharmacies located in Jasper, GA.

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Proposed Solutions



- 1) Stabilize a currently unstable pharmaceutical economic market would be to implement health policy and regulatory reforms
- 2) Utilize innovative solutions in areas where pharmacy deserts already exist
- 3) Stabilize the pharmacy workforce

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Questions

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## Questions?









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