



Simplifying Medication Management in I/DD

How LTC Pharmacy Services Improve Medication Adherence, Support Staff, and Enhance Quality of Life





Overview

Supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) requires compassionate caregivers, effective medication management processes, and the right pharmacy partner. Yet today's providers face growing challenges, including workforce shortages, evolving regulatory requirements, and rising expectations for quality care.

As these challenges continue to grow, simplifying medication management has become increasingly important. Well-designed medication management reduces administrative burden, strengthens medication safety, and gives staff more time to focus on supporting the individuals they serve.

I/DD providers should expect more from their long-term care (LTC) pharmacy partner than medication delivery. The right pharmacy reduces medication management complexity through specialized clinical expertise, connected technology, staff education, proactive communication, and dedicated local support.

In this guide, you'll learn how the right pharmacy partnership can simplify medication management, improve medication adherence and safety, and help your organization better support both the individuals you serve and the employees who care for them.

Why Medication Management Is More Complex Than Ever

For individuals with I/DD, taking medications as prescribed is essential to managing chronic conditions, minimizing adverse effects, and supporting overall health. Yet medication regimens are increasingly complex. In fact, 80% of individuals with I/DD are prescribed five or more medications, and more than 60% take 10 or more.¹ Safely managing multiple medications requires individualized support and consistent coordination among direct support professionals (DSPs), nurses, medication aides, prescribers, and pharmacy teams.

This complexity also affects the employees responsible for medication administration. DSPs and other frontline staff may have limited clinical training yet must follow detailed medication procedures accurately and consistently. When processes are difficult to navigate or pharmacy support is limited, medication-related responsibilities can increase stress, consume valuable time, and add to the demands of an already challenging role.

Several common barriers make managing medications more difficult for both individuals and staff:

Staff Challenges: High turnover creates a constant need to onboard and train new employees. Organizations understand that well-trained staff make fewer medication errors, but providing consistent education can be difficult amid ongoing workforce shortages. DSPs balance medication administration alongside personal care, meals, transportation, documentation, and many other daily responsibilities. As medication regimens become more complex, ongoing training and support become increasingly important. Without them, DSPs may feel overwhelmed and underprepared, increasing stress and the potential for errors.

88%
of community-based
providers of I/DD services
experience moderate to
severe staffing shortages.²

Increasing Clinical Complexity: Medication regimens for individuals with I/DD often involve multiple chronic conditions, behavioral health medications, complex dosing schedules, and frequent therapy changes. As individuals with I/DD are living longer, many are also experiencing age-related chronic conditions, increasing the complexity of medication regimens and the risk of polypharmacy.

Without access to pharmacy teams that understand the clinical and regulatory complexities of I/DD, staff may lack timely guidance when medication-related questions arise or an individual's condition changes. Limited clinical support can make it more difficult to identify medication-related problems, monitor for adverse effects, optimize therapy, and ensure medications are used safely and effectively.





Limited Pharmacy Partnership & Support:

Retail and mail-order pharmacies are designed to dispense medications, not to support the day-to-day operational, clinical, and regulatory demands of I/DD providers. As a result, organizations may find themselves managing medication-related issues with limited guidance, delayed responses, and little ongoing support. Questions about medication changes, delayed deliveries, insurance coverage, or prescriber communication often require staff to spend additional time coordinating solutions on their own.

Without dedicated account management, routine on-site support, and a pharmacy team that understands the unique needs of I/DD providers, medication management becomes more time-consuming and places additional strain on already busy care teams.

Disconnected Communication & Limited Technology: Effective medication management depends on timely communication and real-time access to accurate information. Yet many providers still rely on pharmacies that offer limited technology integration, requiring staff to manage medication-related tasks through phone calls, faxes, and manual follow-up.

In organizations that lack eMAR integration, secure mobile communication, and a pharmacy portal that provides visibility into medication management workflows, staff may spend valuable time tracking down information, clarifying orders, and coordinating medication changes. Without barcode-enabled packaging that verifies the right medication in the eMAR during medication administration, providers lose an important technology-enabled safety feature.

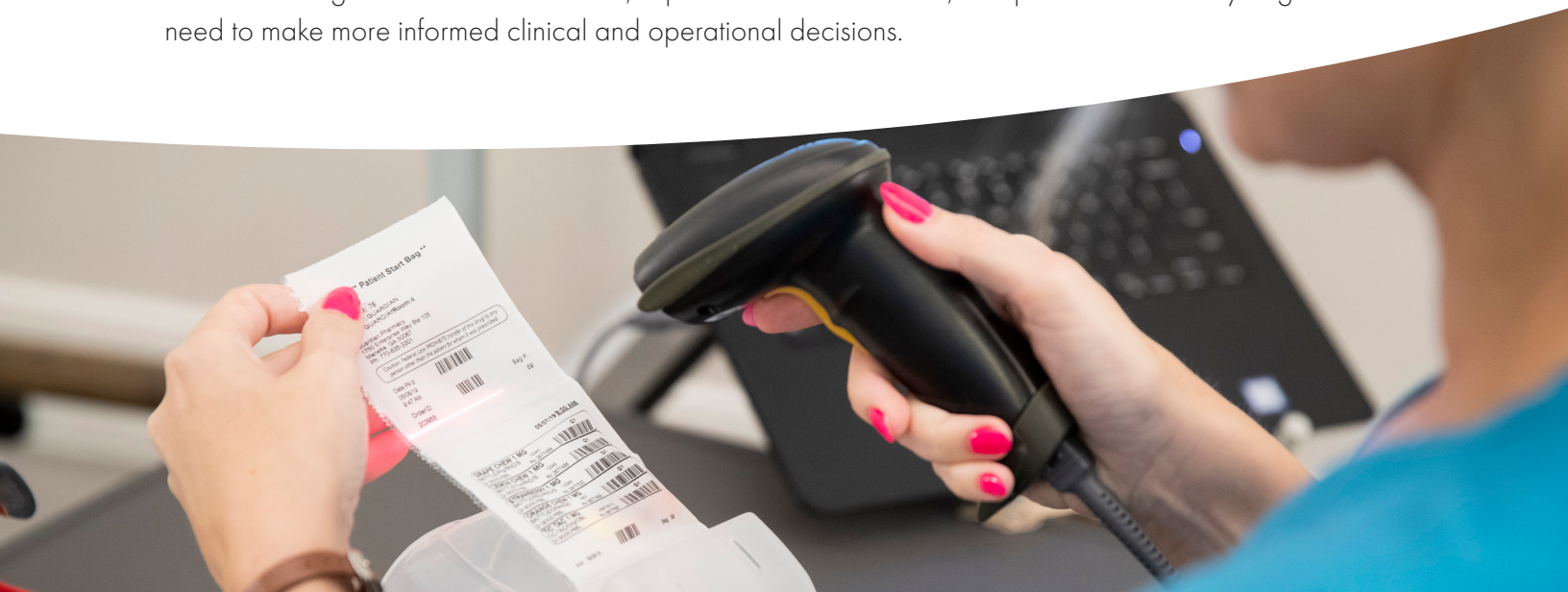
These disconnected workflows burden staff, increase risk for medication errors, delay communication, and reduce time available to support the individuals they serve.

Persistent workforce shortages make simple, well-supported medication management processes more important than ever.

Pharmacy Solutions That Improve Medication Management

The right pharmacy partner does more than dispense medications—it becomes an extension of your care team. An experienced LTC pharmacy combines specialized clinical expertise, connected technology, responsive local support, and ongoing education to simplify medication management, minimize administrative demands, and improve medication safety. Collectively, these services help organizations better support both their employees and the individuals they serve.

- **Clinical Expertise & Medication Safety:** LTC pharmacies provide pharmacists and nurses with expertise in managing medications for individuals with complex care needs, along with a deep understanding of the unique clinical and regulatory requirements of I/DD services. Providers should also expect proactive clinical programs that identify medication-related risks and opportunities to optimize therapy before medications are dispensed, improving medication safety and supporting better outcomes.
- **Person-Centered Pharmacy Services:** No two individuals have the same medication needs. A pharmacy partner should take a person-centered approach by working with prescribers and care teams to identify opportunities to optimize medication regimens, improve adherence, and enhance independence and quality of life. Whether adjusting medication timing, recommending an alternative dosage form, or evaluating opportunities to reduce medication burden, individualized recommendations ensure medications are both safe and practical for each person.
- **Smart Medication Packaging:** Medication packaging plays an important role in safety, efficiency, and adherence. Standardized packaging organized by administration time makes medication passes easier and reduces the risk of medication errors. Consistent labeling and barcode-enabled packaging further improve accuracy and make medication administration easier for staff.
- **Connected Technology:** Technology that supports safe, efficient medication use extends beyond eMAR integration. Secure mobile communication allows nurses, DSPs, and pharmacy teams to communicate more effectively. Integrated technologies also provide real-time order tracking, delivery confirmation, convenient access to medication information, and visibility into behind-the-scenes pharmacy activities. On-demand reporting and advanced data analytics help organizations identify trends and measure performance. Together, these technologies streamline workflows, improve care coordination, and provide the visibility organizations need to make more informed clinical and operational decisions.





Beyond Medication Dispensing: A True Pharmacy Partnership

Effective medication management requires more than timely and accurate administration. The right pharmacy partner strengthens daily operations by providing local support, responsive communication, education, and operational expertise that reduce administrative burden and allow staff to focus on the individuals they serve.

- **Local Pharmacy Access & Support:** Unlike retail and mail-order pharmacies, LTC pharmacies are purpose-built to support organizations that provide around-the-clock care. Local brick-and-mortar pharmacies with routine, after-hours, and emergency medication deliveries ensure medications arrive when and where they're needed. Combined with 24/7 pharmacist access, dedicated account managers, routine on-site visits, and ongoing partnership reviews, local support gives providers confidence that expert assistance is always available.
- **Local Insurance & Billing Support:** Insurance issues shouldn't become a burden for care staff. Dedicated local insurance and billing specialists work directly with prescribers and insurance plans to resolve coverage issues, obtain prior authorizations, and identify clinically appropriate covered alternatives when needed. By managing these challenges on your behalf, they reduce staff strain while ensuring timely access to medications.
- **Education & Staff Development:** Ongoing education makes staff feel more confident managing medications safely and consistently. Pharmacy partners should provide practical training, educational programs, and ongoing clinical support tailored to the unique needs of I/DD providers. As organizations onboard new employees and medication regimens become more complex, access to trusted education strengthens staff confidence and supports safer medication practices.

A Pharmacy Partner That Supports Your Mission

Medication management should support rather than complicate the important work of caring for individuals with I/DD. By simplifying workflows through specialized clinical expertise, connected technology, local support, and true partnership, the right LTC pharmacy helps organizations strengthen medication safety, improve adherence, reduce staff burden, and create more time for what matters most: supporting individuals with I/DD and helping them achieve the highest possible quality of life.

Ready to Get Started?

Connect with a Guardian solution expert to learn how we can support you, your staff, and the individuals you support. Scan the code or visit us at: guardianpharmacy.com/idd



¹Steven R. Erickson, Drita Nicaj & Sasha Barron (2018) Complexity of medication regimens of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 43:3, 351-361.

²American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR). *The State of America's Direct Support Workforce Crisis*: 2025.



Guardian Pharmacy Services is one of the nation's largest and most innovative long-term care pharmacy companies. We provide outstanding client service and resident care to long-term care communities including assisted living, skilled nursing, mental and behavioral health, and those that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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