



How Continued Innovation Improves Access to Lifesaving Drugs

Price is only one factor that shapes access to drugs. Patients also need to be able to travel to care, tolerate treatment, and stick with their regimen for a drug to have meaningful benefits. Continued innovation — and strong IP protections — deliver options that help address these barriers.

Even when drugs are low-cost, they may not meet patients' needs.

Complicated dosing schedules, difficulty traveling to treatment, or lack of resources like reliable refrigeration can impede access to lifesaving treatments. Some patients may even experience serious side effects or have trouble metabolizing a drug. These barriers reduce the effectiveness of available therapies and increase nonadherence, which is responsible for **125,000 yearly deaths** and up to **\$300 billion in annual costs** in the United States.

Continued innovation can help overcome barriers to access.

Pharmaceutical companies often continue researching a drug after it's approved, in search of new formulations, alternative delivery methods, and expanded uses that align treatments with patient needs and real-world conditions. These “follow-on” innovations improve adherence and patient outcomes.

- **Existing drug:** IV-only formulation administered in-clinic
Follow-on innovation: Oral option that expands access in low-resource and rural settings
- **Existing drug:** Adult dosing and delivery
Follow-on innovation: Pediatric dosing and delivery
- **Existing drug:** Requires refrigeration
Follow-on innovation: Heat-stable formulation suitable for wider distribution
- **Existing drug:** Complex multi-pill regimen
Follow-on innovation: Single-pill combination therapy that simplifies care
- **Existing drug:** Common side effects
Follow-on innovation: Reformulation that reduces adverse reactions
- **Existing drug:** Approved for one condition
Follow-on innovation: New indications extending benefits to additional patient groups

Intellectual property protections are critical for continued innovation.

Patents and other forms of market exclusivity incentivize the risky, costly research and development of new versions of existing medicines. Strengthening and upholding these protections helps sustain the continued innovation that makes medicines more available, usable, and effective for diverse patient populations.

This one-pager is based on an Eira Initiative policy brief by Kristina Aciri, “Equity in the Access to Medicines: The Importance of Incentivizing and Protecting Follow-on Innovation.”