

Title: Improving Access to Essential Medicines Through Community Pharmacy Integration into the Lagos State Health Insurance Scheme: Early Implementation of Nigeria's First State-Level Public–Private Partnership

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Background: Access to essential medicines is the cornerstone of Universal Health Coverage and is essential for improving health outcomes. Despite the relatively increasing health insurance coverage, hospital-based dispensing of medicines in many low- and middle-income countries remains constrained, particularly because of stockouts of essential medicines.

Objectives: To describe the implementation of a community pharmacy integration model under the Ilera Eko Drug Access Expansion Program.

Methods: A descriptive implementation study was conducted to document the rollout of the Ilera Eko Drug Access Expansion Program between April 2024 and March 2026. The data were retrieved from administrative records maintained by the Lagos State Health Management Agency (LASHMA) and the Association of Community Pharmacists, Lagos State. This includes accredited community pharmacies (spread across the 20 Local Government Areas in Lagos State), enrolment, geographic distribution, and medicine reimbursement records. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize implementation outcomes.

Results: Between April 2024 and March 2026, a total of 195 Community Pharmacists (55% Female, 45% Male) took part in the Ilera Eko Drug Access Expansion Initiative, with drugs valued at approximately ₦940M (Nine Hundred and Forty Million Naira) dispensed and reimbursed by the government agency to these CPs within the period. The initiative also provided a referral linkage between hospitals on the Ilera Eko scheme (public and private) and community pharmacies, coordinated by LASHMA.

Conclusion: The Ilera Eko Drug Access Expansion Initiative demonstrated the feasibility of integrating private community pharmacies into a government-led health insurance program to improve access to essential medicines and pharmaceutical care. This also strengthens collaboration within the healthcare system. The initiative supports patients' convenience by allowing them to visit any community pharmacy in the network for their medication. Further studies will assess outcomes like prescription refill rates, patient satisfaction, and the economic sustainability of participating community pharmacies. These should provide evidence to guide program refinement and the implementation of similar initiatives.

Keywords: Community Pharmacies, Essential Medicines, Lagos State Health Insurance Scheme, Lagos State Health Management Agency, Universal Health Coverage