

YORKDISPATCH

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Keeping York healthy starts with access to medication

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In recent years, pharmacies across Pennsylvania, including here in York County, have been closing at an alarming rate. A [2025 investigation](#) found 800 licensed pharmacies have shut down in Pennsylvania since 2020, widening health disparities and reducing access to essential medication.

These closures hit hardest in rural and underserved neighborhoods, where residents already face non-medical health challenges like transportation, financial constraints, and gaps in insurance coverage.

The impact of these closures shows up in the daily lives of the people who call York home.

More: [Family First Pharmacy to open in downtown York City](#)

More: [As other pharmacies close, Family First Health prepares to open new option](#)

More: [On public health, Pa., other states are on their own](#)

As a Doctor of Pharmacy, I've seen how these gaps ripple through a community. When pharmacies close, people delay filling prescriptions. They skip doses to stretch what they have left. They go without medications altogether because the cost is too high or the pharmacy is too far. The York County Health Needs Assessment in 2022 found about 5 percent of residents, about 23,000 people, couldn't get the prescriptions they needed because they couldn't afford them. Statewide, [one in four](#)

Pennsylvanians has rationed medication — cutting pills in half, skipping doses, or not filling a prescription at all — because of cost.

Delayed prescriptions or inaccessible medication can quickly escalate into serious health consequences. Complications from unmanaged conditions lead to hospitalizations, missed work, and long-term costs that affect families and employers alike. Nationally, research shows that **33 to 69 percent** of medication-related hospital admissions are tied to poor medication adherence, costing the U.S. healthcare system an estimated \$100 billion each year.

These health risks are compounded by the rising cost of prescription drugs.

Between January 2025 and today, **the prices of 688 drugs have increased**. The median price increase was 5.5 percent, and 25 medications have more than doubled in price. Among them are medications to treat cancer, cystic fibrosis, depression, asthma, and blood clots— conditions that affect millions of Americans. For many York County residents already struggling to cover basic expenses, these increases make following prescription guidelines nearly impossible.

Yet, affordability isn't the only barrier keeping people from getting the medications they need.

Populations especially at risk include low-income, rural, Black, Latino, and older residents (, and individuals with transportation and/or language barriers. These groups are more likely to skip doses, delay filling prescriptions, and experience poor health outcomes.

York County reflects these vulnerabilities. The regional population is aging, with adults over age 65 **projected to represent more than 20 percent of the population by 2040**. Within the City of York, **more than 22 percent** of residents live in poverty, and nearly one in five households lacks access to a vehicle, making even a short trip to the pharmacy a challenge.

When a community's most vulnerable residents — the elderly, low-income families, and those managing chronic illness — face multiple barriers at once, the consequences extend far beyond individual health. These challenges strain families, increase preventable hospital visits, and drive-up healthcare costs across the system.

For more than 55 years, **Family First Health** has worked to remove the barriers that stand between our community and better health. That mission guided the decision to open **Family First Pharmacy** at our George Street location in October, an on-site resource designed to make medication more affordable and accessible for everyone in our community - from longtime patients to downtown workers.

The pharmacy offers affordable prescriptions and coordinates care closely with providers to help patients stay on track with their medications. By integrating pharmacy services into our care model, we hope to make medication access part of the patient experience.

Still, this is just one local response to a much larger issue. Ensuring that every York County resident can access the medications they need will require collaboration across the healthcare system.

York County's health challenges are complex — cost, transportation, and insurance all play a role— but the solution doesn't have to be. It starts with local access, fair prices, and a commitment to equity.

Medications only work if people can access them. Every prescription filled represents a condition stabilized, a life improved, and a family given peace of mind. Opening the doors of Family First Pharmacy is one step toward closing those gaps and keeping York healthy.

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