



Building a Better On-Ramp to Access Therapy

How technology-first solutions provide speed to therapy and cost savings for pharmaceutical manufacturers

Overcoming barriers to patient access is a pivotal part of any successful drug launch.

Roughly half of new launches that miss first-year forecasts do so largely attributed to market-access challenges, including patients' out-of-pocket expenses and higher-than-anticipated costs on discounts and rebates.¹ These challenges are especially pronounced for high-cost specialty medications. Among new launches in 2021, only 1 in 4 prescriptions written for those brands made it to first filling.²

These trends signal that the “old playbook” for onboarding patients — one that relies on time-consuming manual processes to help patients enroll into services to help access treatment and providing ongoing support — is no longer working.

Instead, it's creating a patient journey so complex that patients will avoid treatment rather than navigate the health care system. It's also ramping up the burden on already stressed health care providers, making it more difficult to support patients as they get on and stay on their treatment plans.

Thankfully, the areas of greatest inefficiency in patient onboarding are also the ones most ripe to be enhanced by technology — and biopharma brands have an opportunity to leverage technology-first solutions to help.

In this guide, we'll discuss the challenges to providing smooth onboarding for patients, as well as how pharma brands can leverage technology to help overcome these challenges and connect to the right patients, via the right channels, at the right time.





Patients' journeys have evolved. But specialty onboarding has lagged behind.

Maximizing fill rates and connecting patients to the treatment they need requires minimizing friction for both the prescribing physician and the patient. Here, manual processes become a significant bottleneck — one that can increase leakage at multiple stages of a patient's journey.

Inefficiencies in the hub

Matching patients to the most appropriate treatment starts with quickly and easily obtaining a complete picture of a patient's benefits as they pertain to an individual drug.

Ideally, the hub should provide insight into requirements to initiate treatment, such as the clinical requirements for prior-authorization treatment or step-1 drugs for step therapy. It should also help

HCPs and patients gain insight into what patients' out-of-pocket expenses may be and offer a seamless gateway to specialty pharmacies to dispense treatment.

However, prescribers face challenges in accessing the insights they need quickly, delaying time-to-fill.

What's more, the customer experience across a patient population is inconsistent, said Bill Dupere, partnerships and product development lead at Mercalis. "There is significant variability within a brand's limited distribution network. That means some patients will need to circle all the way back around to onboard with eRx at an intake pharmacy that serves as the navigator for the patient's journey to access therapy."

Inefficiencies in the prescriber's office

Leakage can also occur well before a provider ever makes it to the hub, especially when onboarding patients to specialty therapeutics.

While retail has shifted toward electronic prescriptions, streamlining specialty prescribing has been a much slower process — one laden with swivel-chair, duplicate processes that remain separate from normal prescribing. HCPs may need to fill out multiple consent forms, as well as solicit consents from patients, to move on to the next step on the patient's journey.

“The time involved to do this creates a lot of leakage,” said Jack McGuire, vice president, strategic pharmacy operations at Mercialis.

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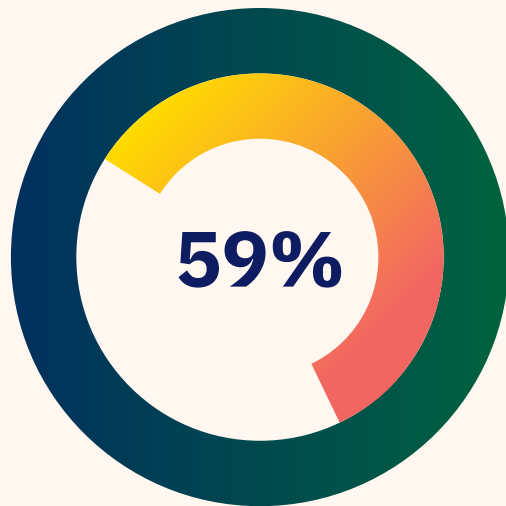
Something as simple as a poorly designed enrollment form or repeated exposure to slow onboarding for a particular brand can cause providers to switch therapies. It is fairly common for prescriptions to never make it to the patient services provider.

JACK MCGUIRE,
Vice President, Strategic Pharmacy Operations, Mercialis



Specialty carve-out programs exacerbate the problem

Making matters worse is the increased pressure on employers to reduce the costs of their self-funded plans and the resulting rise of specialty carve-out programs. These initiatives allow employers to deny coverage for specialty therapeutics, shifting the cost burden onto patients as well as alternate funding providers (AFPs) for help accessing treatment.



59% of pharma brands say that specialty carve-out programs affect their portfolio.³

While AFPs have typically included third-party foundations and nonprofit groups with the resources to help patients access care, new organizations positioning themselves as AFPs direct patients to manufacturers' financial-assistance programs instead.

This can be catastrophic for patients, who may face thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket expenses once their patient assistance maxes out. It also increases the burden on manufacturers' financial-assistance programs, as patients who should have had coverage via their employer-sponsored benefits must now leverage resources intended for low-income patients.

"These so-called AFPs have actually become a deterrent to therapy," Dupere said. "The industry is now spending time, money, energy and other resources to deny eligibility for access to care."

Pharma companies face challenges in adapting to this shift. More than 6 in 10 (62%) of pharma brands say they can't identify when an AFP is affecting their program³, since brands may not distinguish true patients from those enrolled in AFPs. And, as a result, they can't devise strategies to help.

Overcoming these challenges requires rebuilding the on-ramp

Streamlining the patient and provider experience — and maximizing fill rates — requires rethinking the first steps to accessing treatment. And technology-first solutions can help biopharma brands create an on-ramp that works.

“The optimal on-ramp allows HCPs and pharma brands to spend less resources acquiring the raw information detailing the patient’s benefits and their respective barriers to access, and instead spend resources on facilitating the patients’ next steps,” Dupere said.

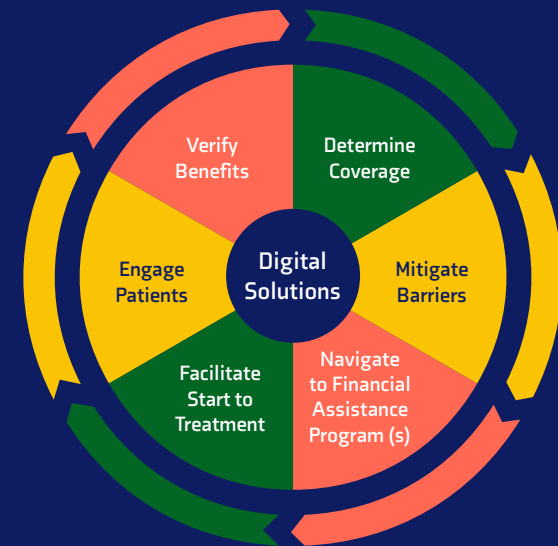
As a result, pharma brands can:

- **Relieve HCP burden**, by digitizing tedious onboarding processes and reducing the need for duplicate work.
- **Speed time to treatment**, by streamlining duplicate or unnecessary steps to more swiftly connect patients to the life-changing therapies they need.
- **Increase adherence and LTV** by helping patients make the most of PSP and assistance programs throughout the duration of their treatment.





Framework for an ideal on-ramp



The ideal solutions should be:

- **Integrated**, to fit seamlessly in HCPs' workflows while creating a convenient experience for patients.
- **Modular** and adaptable to a range of patient populations, therapeutics and use cases.
- **Holistic**, with end-to-end support for each step of a patient's journey.



How can technology-first solutions help?

Curate and simplify eServices

eServices play a pivotal role in verifying benefits, determining coverage and addressing barriers to help accelerate time to treatment.

However, eServices were not traditionally optimized for patient support programs (PSPs), and combining different eServices remains a challenge, as eService providers use different data formats and data-exchange protocols, explained Michael Harris, vice president, patient support services strategy at Mercalis.

“As a result, manufacturers looking to leverage eServices must develop the digital assets to refine and fine-tune each eService for the requirements of each specific PSP,” he said. “No entity has the resources to produce these digital assets on their own.”

Mercalis eServices Curator model curates eServices across various service providers into one unified and holistic engine, Harris explained. “It’s an orchestration of the right eServices at the right time, based on the right inputs and outputs, to stratify the patient into their next step in the patient journey.”

The result is a modular, configurable solution that allows users to easily mix and match eServices from multiple providers across the patient’s journey – without the need to develop additional digital assets to integrate various eServices. Users also have the option to use Mercalis eServices Curator to match with their preferred providers – or proceed directly to payer outreach.



Patient identification at enrollment

The Mercalis eServices Curator model can also play a key role in stratifying patients at enrollment to ensure they're matched with the optimal patient support services for their needs, Harris said. "Our goal is to know the patient's insurance information at the time of enrollment without putting an undue burden on patients."

Using Mercalis eServices Curator, patients can quickly access copay benefits or patient affordability enrollment via a simple web process, rather than having to procure multiple forms and documents to determine their eligibility.

Mercalis eServices Curator can also identify if a patient is affected by an accumulator or maximizer program to help ensure a consistent patient experience, Harris explained. "Identification at enrollment lets us pick the best path from the beginning, so you can be proactive about the impact of accumulators and maximizers on your program. Plus, patients are more likely to stick to their treatment because they won't feel like their program changed midstream."

Streamline time to treatment with Mercalis' intake pharmacy model

The duplicate and tedious work involved in enrollment is a primary cause of leakage. And while eServices can facilitate the process, Mercalis' intake pharmacy model can help providers and patients sidestep it entirely.

Mercalis' intake pharmacy model replaces the enrollment process — filling out the enrollment form in triplicate, gathering patient consent and provider attestations, and sending these to a patient services provider hub — with an electronic prescription.

Providers can send their eRx to a preferred pharmacy or direct it to Mercalis' Pharmacy, to dispense free goods or bridge supply for qualified patients.



TURNING INSIGHT TO ACTION:

How to incorporate technology-first solutions in your patient access strategy

1 Evaluate your needs first

Each therapeutic and each patient population has its own unique challenges to patient access. And biopharma brands are best served by reflecting on their pain points, McGuire said.

“Do you have leakage at the point of prescribing, or is it leakage at the hub? Is it leakage switching to the specialty pharmacy? Do you have the visibility to know?”

While a trusted vendor can help you through the process, taking an inventory of your visibility and pain points allows you to hit the ground running to devise solutions, he said.

2 Ask for a vendor’s assessment

Once you’ve inventoried your potential needs, look to prospective vendors’ expertise to fill in any gaps and build out your PSP. The ideal partner should be willing to offer an assessment to help you understand the types of solutions available to you and how they can enhance your program, Harris said.

“Our goal is to offer something tangible when we’re talking to a potential client for the first time,” he explained. “If you can understand how much you’re impacted by not adopting digital tools, you can gain insights into how to fix it and the type of ROI you may be able to expect.”

3 Focus on education

Technology-first solutions can streamline and enhance your PSP — but ultimately, any program is only as robust as the people executing it. So, it’s critical to focus on education to ensure HCPs and other stakeholders can use the solutions wisely.

McGuire recommended taking a two-pronged approach to education. “Meet providers directly by integrating education in their workflows via messaging in the EHR and deploy an incorporated field team for education on the overall PSP strategy.”

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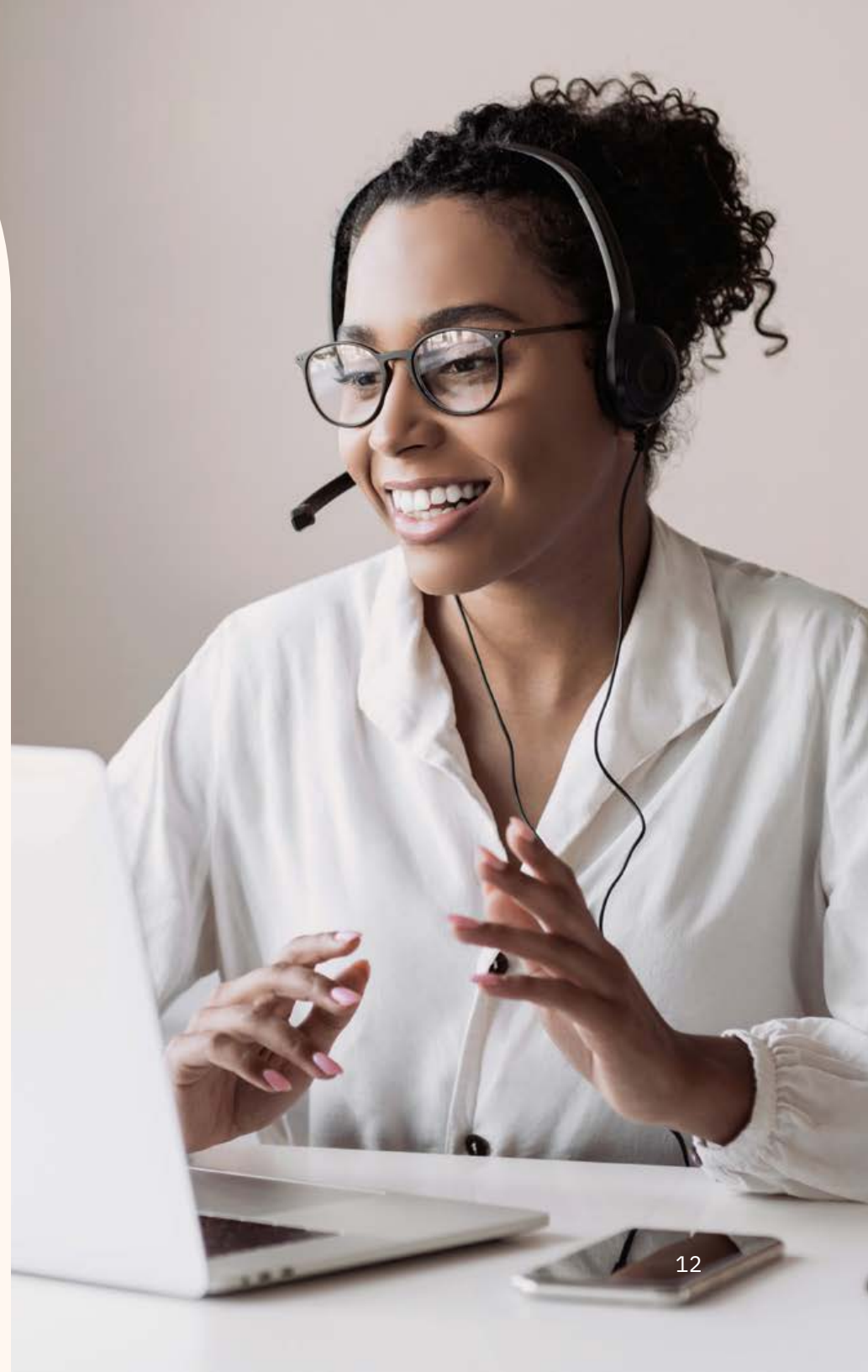
Boost outcomes for patients, providers and pharma with technology-first solutions

As patient journeys continue to grow more complex, and out-of-pocket expenses for specialty therapeutics continue to rise, pharma brands must find ways to enhance PSPs with technology-first solutions — or they risk being left behind.

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The growth curve of technology is exponential, and if you're not adopting new technologies now, your program can only go so far. With the right technologies, you can not only create a better support program, you can create brand recognition with providers to grow your brand.”

MICHAEL HARRIS,
Vice President, Patient Support Services Strategy, Mercalis





How Mercalis can help

Mercalis is the leading integrated commercialization partner for life sciences companies.

We deliver end-to-end commercial solutions that work together to provide patient support services, health care provider engagement, and payer intelligence and strategic consulting.

For more information about Mercalis, please visit **Mercalis.com** or contact us at **sales@mercalis.com**

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