

UNDER PRESSURE

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO MEDICINES TO TREAT HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

High blood pressure, or hypertension, is the world's leading cause of death, killing more than 10 million people every year – more than all infectious diseases combined. Three quarters of those with high blood pressure live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), but fewer than one in 10 of these people are effectively treated. Expanding access to affordable and safe essential hypertension medicines can save millions of lives.

Developed by Resolve to Save Lives and Médecins Sans Frontières, *Under Pressure* presents the challenges surrounding patient access to blood pressure medication, based on a review of current market and regulatory conditions in five large LMICs: Brazil, Lebanon, Nigeria, the Philippines and South Africa.

The report found:

Generic hypertension medicine prices vary substantially across LMICs, with medicines in some countries costing 40 times more than the estimated cost-based generic price.

- Amlodipine, a widely used blood pressure medication, has an estimated cost-based generic price of \$0.01 USD per tablet; the actual per tablet cost in the private sector is \$0.11 in South Africa and \$0.22 in Lebanon.
- The estimated cost-based generic price of the treatment regimen telmisartan 40 mg+ amlodipine 5mg was \$0.02 USD, but actually cost \$0.81 USD per tablet in Lebanon.
- Other individual and combination medications, including hydrochlorothiazide, losartan and telmisartan, also had very high prices in some countries, suggesting that affordable, more equitable prices can reduce patients' out-of-pocket expenses substantially.





Pills combining two or more medicines reduce costs, but combination pills are often unavailable or unaffordable to patients.

- Most Essential Medicines Lists (EMLs) and clinical guidelines of the surveyed LMICs do not include World Health Organization (WHO)-recommended single-pill combinations, which include two or more hypertension drugs in one pill.
- Single-pill combinations of multiple drugs at low or moderate doses improve patient adherence to medicines and reduce costs for procurement and supply chain management.

Current prices put widespread treatment of high blood pressure out of reach of many people living in LMICs.

- Multiple hypertension drugs and drug protocols are used across countries, leaving many countries with fragmented markets for hypertension medications. The lack of a standardized list of medications for hypertension treatment hinders the government’s and other payer’s ability to negotiate prices.
- Governments are unable to offer affordable prices for these medications and in settings without robust social security systems, many patients are unable to pay for blood pressure medicines out of their own pockets due to the high cost of life-long treatment.

Recommendations

- **Governments** should negotiate long term agreements with suppliers and regulating mark ups to reach an affordable price for patients.
- **Governments** should update their national EMLs and hypertension treatment guidance to include single-pill combination medicines and adopting a standard hypertension treatment protocol.
- **Pharmaceutical manufacturers** should register WHO-recommended hypertension drugs in LMICs to expand access to medications that are safe, effective and comply with quality standards.
- **Civil society and advocates** should demand safe, affordable hypertension treatment aligned with WHO-recommended guidelines; ideally without cost to patients.