

Cancer Medicines to Become More Affordable in India

On 8 October 2026, the Government of India announced a decision to cap trade margins on non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines at **30% of their Maximum Retail Price (MRP)**. The measure is expected to reduce prices of some cancer medicines by up to 70% and save patients approximately ₹2,500 crore annually. <Cite refs={["turn693993search0","turn693993search14"]} />

Key Features of the Decision

The initiative aims to make cancer treatment more affordable by controlling excessive mark-ups in the medicine supply chain.

- **30% trade margin cap:** Margins charged in the supply and sale of covered non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines will be limited to 30% of MRP.
- **Wider price protection:** The decision extends protection to medicines that are not already covered by the government's scheduled price-control framework.
- **Expected financial relief:** The government estimates annual savings of around ₹2,500 crore for cancer patients.
- **Implementation:** An expert committee under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) will finalise the list of medicines covered, after which the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) will issue the official notification. <Cite refs={["turn693993search0","turn693993search14"]} />

The expected price reduction of up to 70% is a government estimate, not a guarantee that every cancer medicine will become cheaper by the same amount.

How Are Cancer Medicine Prices Regulated in India?

The **National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA)** regulates medicine prices under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013.

- **Scheduled medicines:** The NPPA fixes ceiling prices for medicines included in the relevant scheduled list.
- **Non-scheduled medicines:** These are subject to applicable pricing rules, including restrictions on increases in their maximum retail prices. The new decision seeks to limit trade margins for covered non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines.

- **Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013:** It provides the framework for price regulation and compliance in the pharmaceutical sector.

As of 9 March 2026, ceiling prices were in effect for 131 anti-cancer drugs, according to the Department of Pharmaceuticals. <Cite refs=[["turn693993search15"]]/>

Significance of the Initiative

1. Reducing Out-of-Pocket Expenditure

Cancer treatment can involve substantial costs for medicines, diagnostic tests, hospitalisation and follow-up care. Lower medicine prices can reduce the financial burden on patients and families.

2. Promoting Universal Health Coverage

Affordable medicines can improve access to essential treatment, supporting India's broader goal of achieving universal health coverage.

3. Improving Health Equity

Price regulation can help ensure that access to life-saving medicines depends less on a patient's ability to pay.

4. Strengthening Public Health Governance

The initiative highlights the role of government regulation in balancing commercial interests with public health needs.

Challenges Ahead

Effective implementation will require transparent monitoring of medicine prices, strict action against overcharging and safeguards against shortages. Authorities must also ensure that manufacturers and distributors continue supplying medicines while complying with the new rules.

Lower medicine prices must be supported by accessible cancer screening, timely diagnosis, affordable hospital care and stronger public health infrastructure.

UPSC Exam Relevance

Prelims: NPPA, Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013, pharmaceutical price regulation and

public health institutions.

GS Paper II: Government policies, health services and issues related to human development.

GS Paper III: Inclusive growth, healthcare expenditure and the pharmaceutical industry.

Possible UPSC Mains Question: *How can medicine price regulation improve access to healthcare in India? Discuss its benefits and implementation challenges.*

Conclusion

The decision to cap trade margins on covered non-scheduled anti-cancer medicines is an important step towards reducing treatment costs in India. Its success will depend on effective implementation, transparent price monitoring and the continued availability of quality medicines.

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