



PRESS RELEASE

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Public thematic report

PROPER USE OF HEALTHCARE PRODUCTS

Healthcare products, defined as medicines and medical devices for individual use, are prescribed and dispensed to patients in order to diagnose or treat them. In 2023, almost 15,000 drugs references were covered by the national health insurance system. Medical devices, on the other hand, comprise a vast array of very different products, including dressings, wheelchairs and syringes, for example. In this report, the notion of "proper use" covers three dimensions. The first is the actual use of healthcare products, which corresponds to products that are prescribed, dispensed and reimbursed, but destroyed without being used. The second is whether the consumption of a health product complies with health recommendations. The third concerns the efficiency of healthcare product consumption in terms of value for money. The notion of "proper use" used here therefore goes well beyond the common understanding of the absence of "waste".

The proper use of healthcare products is more than just a health and financial issue

The proper use of healthcare products is a major challenge, not only in terms of public health and cost control, but also because of the emergence of environmental concerns and supply tensions. Expenditure on the reimbursement of healthcare products by the national health insurance system amounted to €36.05 billion in 2023 (in net terms), an increase of almost 12% compared with 2019. This trend is particularly pronounced for expenditure on drugs and products dispensed in the community following hospital prescriptions. With regard to health issues, the misuse of medicines and medical devices can result in adverse effects for patients, ranging from simple discomfort to more serious reactions, including death. This has been demonstrated by public health crises directly caused by the inappropriate use of medicines, such as benfluorex (the Mediator® affair). The emergence of environmental concerns and compliance with international commitments on ecological transition are also reinforcing the need for proper use of healthcare products. The healthcare and medico-social sectors account for 50 to 60 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions, or 8 to 10% of France's total. Similarly, the presence of residues from medicines in water is widespread; this could lead to an increase in wastewater treatment costs in the future. Lastly, since the Covid 19 crisis, the supply of healthcare products has been under pressure, with shortages and unavailability in some cases. In 2023, the French National Agency for the Safety of Medicines and Healthcare Products (ANSM) recorded almost 5,000 reports of product unavailability or supply tensions in France, almost twice as many as in 2021, when 2,760 reports were recorded.

A widespread lack of knowledge about the uses of healthcare products, which needs to be remedied

To improve the proper use of healthcare products, it is essential to have a better understanding and control of how they are prescribed and dispensed. For this reason, the *Cour des comptes* recommends that information on the prescribing practices of healthcare professionals should be communicated to healthcare establishments on a regular basis, and that data on medicines dispensed should be included in the patient's shared medical file. We also need to understand why certain products are destroyed without being consumed

or used. Although it is difficult to know precisely the amounts and nature of the expenditure on medicines that could have been avoided, the *Cour des comptes* has carried out an overall assessment of the financial value of unused medicines discarded in the community, based on the volumes collected by the eco-organisation Cyclamed. This calculation method gives an estimate of between €561 million and €1.735 billion per year, depending on whether or not the most expensive drugs are included. The *Cour des comptes* therefore recommends improving understanding of healthcare products discarded in the community by carrying out waste characterisation studies and obtaining centralised feedback from healthcare establishments.

Actions contributing to the proper use of healthcare products must be strengthened

To encourage the correct use of healthcare products, various levers can be mobilised in terms of prescribing, dispensing and pricing. Among the measures implemented by the public authorities, this report analyses those that could be strengthened, both on the demand side - i.e. prescribers and pharmacists - and on the supply side - i.e. manufacturers. The action taken by the national health insurance system with regard to prescribers is essential, but could be improved. This is why the *Cour des comptes* is recommending that the *Caisse nationale d'assurance-maladie* (CNAM) extend the prescription support system to other drugs with a high risk of misuse. The role of community pharmacists must also be strengthened. These professionals can help to reduce health insurance expenditure by substituting a generic drug for a more expensive reference drug when dispensing. They are also carrying out more and more tests (up to 370,000 in October 2024) to determine whether a sore throat is viral or bacterial in origin, and whether antibiotics should be prescribed. Action must also be taken with manufacturers to encourage them to adapt the packaging of health products and to optimise use-by dates. This would avoid dispensing too much medicine for the right dosage, but also avoid the consequences of short expiry dates. To this end, the *Cour des comptes* recommends that the issue of expiry dates and packaging be included in the negotiations on drug pricing. Finally, the production of healthcare products should be part of a more sustainable development approach. The re-dispensing of unused medicines is a promising measure, particularly for expensive drugs. Some medical devices may also be reused once they have been restored to good working order or reprocessed. This is why the *Cour des comptes* recommends broadening the scope for effective re-use of healthcare products, by making it easier to re-dispense the most expensive drugs and re-use certain medical devices.

[Read the report](#)

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et territoriales des comptes
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