

Growth Drivers: The Drugs Shaping Pharmaceutical Expansion in 2026

(Source: An article by Edwin Elmhirst for Scrip)

The global pharmaceutical market is entering a period of accelerated growth in 2026, driven by a combination of breakthrough therapies, expanded indications for established biologics, and lifecycle management strategies designed to protect blockbuster franchises. For pharmaceutical distributors and wholesalers, understanding the therapies expected to generate the largest commercial momentum is critical for anticipating demand, optimizing inventory, and aligning with manufacturers' strategic priorities. Recent forecasts highlight several therapeutic categories—including metabolic disease, immunology, oncology, and respiratory medicine—as key contributors to industry expansion.

One of the most significant drivers of pharmaceutical growth continues to be the *incretin* class of metabolic therapies, particularly Eli Lilly's *tirzepatide* products. The diabetes therapy *Mounjaro* and the obesity treatment *Zepbound* are projected to deliver the largest absolute revenue increases in 2026. *Zepbound* alone is expected to grow by roughly US\$6.7 billion year over year, while *Mounjaro* could add approximately US\$5.3 billion in sales. *Tirzepatide's* dual GLP-1/GIP receptor mechanism has demonstrated superior weight-loss outcomes compared with earlier GLP-1 therapies, helping Lilly capture a majority share of the rapidly expanding *incretin* market. For distributors, the continued surge in demand for obesity and diabetes therapies underscores the importance of supply chain readiness for high-volume chronic disease treatments.

Immunology biologics also remain a cornerstone of pharmaceutical growth. AbbVie's *Skyrizi* is expected to generate nearly US\$3.8 billion in additional sales during 2026, supported by strong uptake across psoriasis and inflammatory bowel disease indications. Similarly, Sanofi and Regeneron's *Dupixent* continues to expand through new indications such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and chronic spontaneous urticaria. These therapies highlight the growing importance of specialty distribution capabilities, particularly for biologics that require complex handling, reimbursement coordination, and patient support programs.

Beyond established blockbusters, several recently launched products are projected to experience rapid percentage growth. These include Merck's COPD therapy *Ohtuvayre*, Gilead's long-acting HIV prevention therapy *Yeztugo*, and Bristol Myers Squibb's subcutaneous oncology formulation *Opdivo Qvantig*. Such products illustrate how pharmaceutical manufacturers are pursuing both novel mechanisms and improved delivery formats to sustain franchise value as patents approach expiration. For distributors and wholesalers, these trends signal several strategic implications. Demand will continue shifting toward high-value specialty medicines, particularly in metabolic

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In Brief...

- ◆ **McKesson Corporation** announced that *Britt Vitalone*, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer will retire after a successful and distinguished 20-year career, including eight years as CFO. *Kenny Cheung*, Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of **Sysco**, will assume the role following Vitalone's retirement effective May 29, 2026.

- ◆ **Cencora** and **Covetrus** have entered into a definitive agreement under which Covetrus and **MWI Animal Health** will merge, creating a company that will offer a comprehensive animal health platform. Upon closing Cencora will receive upfront cash proceeds of US\$1.25 billion, US\$800 million preferred equity and US\$1.45 billion in common equity in the combined company, resulting in a non-controlling 34.3% equity stake in the combined company. Separately, Cencora has released its 2026 Corporate Sustainability Report. The report highlights progress in enabling purpose-driven team members, building healthy communities and strengthening resilient and sustainable operations

- ◆ **CVS Health** is teaming up with **Google Cloud** to launch **Health 100**, a new health technology unit that will be tasked with building an integrated health engagement platform for consumers. The platform will rely on artificial intelligence to deliver an omnichannel experience, with technical support from Google's enterprise software, *Cloud API* and their suite of **Gemini AI** tools. The goal is to build an "always-on personal healthcare partner." Health 100 will provide users with key data and support to eliminate the "homework" they need to do to keep up with their healthcare, including greater access to price transparency and benefit data to make it easier to track and manage costs.

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Generational Shifts are Redefining the Wellness Economy

(Source: An article by Sandra Levy for Drug Store News)

Generational shifts are redefining the wellness economy, creating new opportunities and strategic considerations across the healthcare and pharmaceutical supply chain. Research from Circana indicates that consumers increasingly approach wellness through a holistic lens—encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and functional health—which is influencing purchasing decisions across food, beverage, and consumer health categories. As these expectations evolve, manufacturers, retailers, and distributors must adapt product portfolios and supply strategies to align with changing definitions of health and wellness.

The research highlights clear generational differences in wellness priorities. Younger consumers, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, gravitate toward convenient, functional products that deliver immediate benefits such as energy, hydration, immunity support, and stress management. These preferences

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Growth Drivers (cont'd.)...

disease, immunology, and oncology. At the same time, lifecycle innovations—such as new formulations and expanded indications—will extend the commercial life of major therapies, sustaining volumes for years to come. As manufacturers scale production and global uptake accelerates, supply chain partners that can manage complex biologics distribution and support specialty pharmacy ecosystems will play an increasingly central role in the pharmaceutical value chain.

New FDA Guidance Could Elevate Pharma's Biosimilars Market

(Source: An article by Michael Gibney for PharmaVoice)

New draft guidance from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) could significantly reshape the biosimilars market by lowering development barriers and accelerating competition for high-cost biologic medicines. The agency's proposed framework would allow biosimilar developers, in certain circumstances, to rely on existing data from the reference biologic rather than conducting the full suite of comparative studies traditionally required. If implemented, this approach could reduce development complexity, shorten timelines, and lower the substantial costs associated with bringing biosimilars to market.

Biosimilars have long been viewed as a mechanism to introduce competition into the biologics segment, which accounts for a disproportionate share of pharmaceutical spending despite representing a smaller portion of prescriptions. However, uptake in the United States has been slower than anticipated due to regulatory complexity, patent litigation, and high development costs that can exceed hundreds of millions of dollars. These barriers have limited the number of manufacturers willing to invest in biosimilar development and slowed price competition for some of the industry's most expensive therapies.

Evidence from existing biosimilar markets demonstrates their potential to reduce costs. For example, biosimilars for Roche's breast cancer drug *Herceptin* entered the U.S. market in 2019 and contributed to price reductions of roughly 30%. Similarly, biosimilars referencing AbbVie's blockbuster immunology drug *Humira* launched with discounts approaching 50% relative to the originator product's wholesale acquisition cost.

If the FDA's updated guidance successfully lowers development hurdles, major biosimilar manufacturers—including companies such as Amgen, Pfizer, and Sandoz—could benefit from a clearer and more efficient regulatory pathway. Ultimately, increased biosimilar competition may help expand patient access to biologic therapies while exerting downward pressure on prescription drug prices across the U.S. healthcare system.

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Generational Shifts (cont'd.)...

are driving growth in functional beverages, nutraceuticals, and lifestyle-oriented health solutions. Younger shoppers are also more likely to engage across digital and omnichannel environments, accelerating demand for flexible distribution models that support both traditional and emerging retail formats.

At the same time, midlife and older consumers—including Gen X and Baby Boomers—remain highly focused on preventive health and long-term wellness. While their purchasing habits are often anchored in more established retail and pharmacy channels, these groups continue to account for the largest share of overall spending in key wellness-related categories.

For pharmaceutical distributors and wholesalers, these generational shifts underscore the growing convergence of consumer wellness and traditional healthcare products. Expanding demand for preventive care, functional health solutions, and OTC categories will require distributors to support a broader mix of products while maintaining efficient access to pharmacies, drug stores, and retail partners. Organizations that align distribution capabilities with evolving consumer wellness priorities will be better positioned to capture growth within the expanding consumer health and wellness marketplace.

In Brief (cont.)

- ◆ Japan unveiled new NHI prices under the FY2026 drug price revision with the reduction rate coming to 4.02% on a drug spending basis. The reduction corresponds to a previously announced 0.86% cut on a healthcare spending basis, a figure the government disclosed in December as part of the overall FY2026 reimbursement revision package. The ministry did not provide a detailed breakdown of the drug price revision rate, such as the portion attributable to market price adjustments or other re-pricing rules.
- ◆ **Eli Lilly** announced the launch of a direct-to-employer GLP-1 access platform aimed directly at the 50% of U.S. employers that are not presently covering GLP-1s for weight loss. The platform provides employers with access to a US\$449 off-benefit price across all *Zepbound* doses facilitated via an array of program administrator offerings ranging from low-cost benefits administration only to holistic obesity care programs.
- ◆ **Hims & Hers** and **Novo Nordisk** have officially come to an agreement that will see Novo's branded GLP-1 weight loss and diabetes medications sold through the Hims' telehealth platform. The telehealth company will stop promoting its roster of compounded GLP-1 medications, giving its existing patients the chance to transition to a branded version in consultation with a healthcare provider. Novo CEO, *Mike Doustdar* called the Hims agreement a "meaningful win" for patients.
- ◆ Pharma manufacturer **Sandoz** is planning to launch a dedicated biosimilars unit that will operate separately from the company's remaining small molecule generics division. With a focus on development, manufacturing and supplying copycat biologic drugs, the new unit will be led by *Armin Metzger*. Metzger most recently served as the chief technical operations officer at Swiss drugmaker Ferring Pharmaceuticals.

(Sources: Company Press Releases, Fierce Biotech, Fierce Pharma, Pharma Japan, and Pharma Voice)