

Venezuela's prescription for drug shortage: herbs

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With an estimated five percent of needed medicines available, Venezuela on Friday launched a health plan that relies on herbs and natural remedies.

The "100 percent Natural Health Plan" seeks the "rescue of historic and patrimonial [health](#), knowledge of the old ladies," President Nicolas Maduro said at the presidential palace.

Oil-rich and once one of the wealthiest countries in Latin America, Venezuela has seen its economy decimated under Maduro.

Falling oil prices, deadly protests, and corruption have coincided with chronic food and medicine shortages, and inflation which the IMF forecasts will exceed 2,300 percent in 2018.

Citizens have demonstrated against shortages of essential goods including medicines. The country's medical union estimated Venezuela's pharmaceutical shortage at 95 percent.

"I am curing a terrible flu that hit me at the beginning of the year with chamomile, aloe, lemon and a little honey," Maduro said.

"This comes from the ancestral knowledge of my family."

The Coalition of Organizations for the Right to Health and Life has denounced an "absolute and prolonged absence" of basic

pharmaceuticals to treat diseases including kidney failure, cancer and multiple sclerosis.

Antibiotics and drugs to control blood pressure are also scarce.

In November, patients and their families marched to the embassies of Canada, Costa Rica, the Netherlands and Peru to ask those countries to press Caracas for a "humanitarian channel" for the entry of medicines to Venezuela.

Maduro's government denies there is a "humanitarian crisis" in the country and blames sanctions imposed by the United States for affecting the importation of food and [medicine](#).

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