

# Study finds nearly half of US counties have at least one 'pharmacy desert'

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Nearly half of counties in the United States have at least one 'pharmacy desert' where there is no retail pharmacy within 10 miles, according to a study [published](#) in *JAMA Network Open* by researchers at The Ohio State

University Comprehensive Cancer Center—Arthur G. James Cancer Hospital and Richard J. Solove Research Institute (OSUCCC—James).

"As pharmacies close, more and more Americans are left without easy access to medications, with disproportionate consequences on certain communities. We found that patients in counties with higher social vulnerabilities and fewer primary care providers were up to 40% more likely to reside in a region with a [pharmacy](#) desert," said Timothy Pawlik, MD, senior author of the study and holder of the Urban Meyer III and Shelley Meyer Chair for Cancer Research at the OSUCCC—James.

Pawlik also serves as surgeon-in-chief at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and as chair of the Department of Surgery in the Ohio State College of Medicine.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) defines [social vulnerability](#) as "potential negative effects on communities caused by external stresses on human health."

"These findings highlight how disparities compound the lack of access to basic health care and how it can lead to many people not taking their prescribed medications and having worse health outcomes, especially for [chronic conditions](#) like diabetes and hypertension," Pawlik added.

Researchers reviewed data on communities located less than 10 miles from the nearest retail pharmacy from the publicly available [TelePharm Map](#). Counties were noted as having a high pharmacy desert density if the number of pharmacy deserts per 1,000 residents was in the 75th percentile.

Social vulnerability index (SVI) and health care provider data were obtained from the [CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease](#)

[Registry](#) and [the Area Health Resource File databases](#), respectively. The researchers used [statistical methods](#) to analyze the relationships between these factors.

The study found almost 46% of the 3,143 counties had at least one pharmacy desert. Counties with a high density of pharmacy deserts had higher social vulnerability and fewer primary care providers. People in these high-density pharmacy desert areas were more likely to face difficulties accessing medications and [health care services](#).

Collaborators in this study include Giovanni Catalano, MD, Muhammad Muntazir Mehdi Khan, MBBS, and Odysseas P. Chatzipanagiotou, MD.

**More information:** Giovanni Catalano et al, Pharmacy Accessibility and Social Vulnerability, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.29755](#)

Provided by Ohio State University Medical Center

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