

**Helping I/DD
Organizations
Resolve Medication
Compliance and Staff
Turnover Issues:
Your Long-Term
Care Pharmacy Can
Play a Role**





OVERVIEW

Serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) is one of the most noble causes. Yet, owners and executives at intermediate care facilities (ICF) and supported living providers are having a difficult time retaining talent.

Despite the demand and the appeal of a purposeful and rewarding career, many professionals are choosing to leave the I/DD industry after finding it challenging to gain the knowledge and skills required to be successful at their job. This decision is not only highly disruptive to other members of the team but to the residents with I/DD who rely on staff for daily assistance.

While a long-term care (LTC) pharmacy cannot resolve this workforce issue alone, the right pharmacy partner can play a vital role in efforts by any ICF and supported living provider to improve quality of care and decrease staff turnover. No longer just about delivering medication, today's LTC pharmacies offer a wide range of value-added services from help with accuracy and efficiency of medication distribution to clinical expertise and educational seminars. Many may even offer staff training.

Learn how partnering with a LTC pharmacy can help ensure medication compliance and equip you and your staff with the knowledge, resources and support necessary to provide exceptional care to individuals with I/DD.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES ENSURING MEDICATION COMPLIANCE IN THE I/DD SETTING

For people with I/DD, taking medications as prescribed is essential to managing chronic conditions, minimizing adverse effects, and improving their overall health. Many often have a tough time with medication adherence whether it is one prescription or more, which is most often the case. In fact, 80% of individuals with I/DD are prescribed five or more medications; more than 60% have 10 or more¹. Juggling numerous medications can be problematic for these individuals, many of whom have trouble performing even the basic activities of daily living and face cognitive, physical, and communication challenges. While the residents rely on direct support professionals, nurses, medication technicians and other employees for medication help, staff who serve them often face challenges ensuring compliance on a daily basis. This complication, coupled with the fact that residents have varying levels of functionality and medication needs, adds to the complexity, stress and demands of the job.

These are just a few factors that have created a staff retention problem. Additional key challenges include:

- **Staff Training:** Constant turnover can hinder an organization's ability to properly train staff. While every ICF and supported living provider understands that well-educated staff members make fewer mistakes, most cannot afford to offer training to new employees on an ongoing basis. If the organization is not engaged with an LTC pharmacy that provides this training, they often have to outsource it, which can be expensive.
- **Poor Pharmacy Support & Communication:** I/DD organizations have unique needs that should involve constant interaction and industry expertise from a pharmacy partner. This level of commitment requires 24/7 pharmacy support and communication. Without it, members of the I/DD staff can be left in situations where they feel overwhelmed and uncertain of the right decision. Sadly, too many organizations experience insufficient assistance from their pharmacy, with some not knowing the appropriate pharmacy contact for every situation, including the best person to answer daily questions and provide after-hours and emergency services.
- **Lack of Access to Newer Technologies:** Technology can play a tremendous role in the accuracy and efficiency of medication management, but with so many program options in the market, organizations may have a hard time researching and understanding which systems are best to meet their immediate and future needs. Additionally, many are still using paper MARs, increasing the workload of the organization's staff and the risk of human transcription error.

Prior to COVID-19, the I/DD industry had a 43.8% national turnover rate for direct support roles². Six months into the pandemic, half of direct support staff reported that their organizations were more short-staffed than before COVID-19³.





PHARMACY SOLUTIONS TO HELP IMPROVE MEDICATION COMPLIANCE & SAFETY

Keeping residents with I/DD safe requires expertise from a medication management team. When you partner with the right LTC pharmacy, you should expect to have a dedicated group of specialists that pay attention to all of your concerns and make getting to know your staff and the medication needs of individuals you serve the top priority. The pharmacy should act as an extension of your team, working with your resident's doctors and your organization's nurses and direct support professionals to ensure all individuals' medication combinations are safe and help eliminate errors during the med pass. Areas where the pharmacy can really support your efforts and assist your staff include:

- **Enhanced Medication Safety:** You should expect your pharmacy to review an individual's entire drug regimen regularly, and when a new medication is added, make certain combinations are safe to minimize adverse drug reactions. Importantly, your pharmacy should work with your staff to help monitor for side effects and evaluate lab values to ensure medications are within recommended ranges for effectiveness and safety.
- **Person-Centered Expertise:** It is important to discern the root of the problem for individuals who do not adhere to medication schedules. For some, changing the timing of when they take their meds or switching to an extended-release formulation may make the difference. For others, alternative medication forms may work better. If injections are a concern, perhaps there is a pill form; if swallowing pills is uncomfortable, consider a liquid. Working with a pharmacy that takes a person-centered approach and helps your staff evaluate these underlying issues can increase medication adherence significantly.
- **Smart Compliance Packaging:** With numerous medications, it can be tough for both residents and staff to keep track of when to take each prescription. A pharmacy should offer specialized, compliance packaging that separates medications by day and hour, reducing the risk of error, simplifying the dispensing of medications, and most of all, making it easy for individuals to take the right medications at the right time.
- **Offering the Latest Technology:** Access to electronic health records and electronic medication administration records (eMARs) can reduce medication errors, keeping residents safe. Unfortunately, many ICF's and supported living providers do not currently have this technology. Take advantage of the technology your pharmacy offers for eMARs. I/DD staff will have real-time data available at all times simplifying updating and ordering of medications; offering access to resident medication profiles with previous history; and improving accuracy through e-prescribing by removing the potential for error when MARs are hand transcribed. For those organizations that already have an eMAR system, make sure the pharmacy you work with interfaces with it.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM YOUR PHARMACY

I/DD organizations should be 100% focused on delivering personal care to individuals, but often other responsibilities may pull staff other directions, leaving them frustrated as they are unable to strictly focus on residents' wellbeing. A LTC pharmacy that specializes in I/DD and understands the extra level of support and service needed to solve medication compliance, customer service and medication billing issues will take on these burdens for you, saving your staff time that is best used for providing care.

- **24/7 Customer Service & Daily Medication Delivery Support:** Building trust takes constant communication and reliability. It requires a personal local touch. When searching for a pharmacy partner, select one who you can depend on to resolve issues at any time and schedule medication deliveries that fit your schedule. When you have questions or an emergency, you should have confidence knowing that pharmacists and staff are available 24/7 to provide answers and deliver medications.
- **Accurate Medication Billing:** This can be one of the most frustrating and confusing areas for residents, their families, and I/DD staff. From issues with pre-authorization and non-covered medications to the customer support 800 numbers, individuals often experience challenges when trying to resolve problems with their bills. Look for your pharmacy partner to work with your residents' physicians and insurance companies to ensure that the prescribed medications or the clinically equivalent alternatives are covered before the prescription is filled and also offer over-the-counter medications at affordable prices.

This eliminates confusion when the bill is received. However, when there are questions, individuals and responsible parties should feel confident that they can talk with a member of the pharmacy team who is familiar with their situation, rather than having to contact a call center and speak with a new person each time.

- **Education and Training:** The need for education is endless and by working with a pharmacy that provides educational seminars and training, organizations will see staff become more confident, helping to decrease turnover. Look for a pharmacy that can recommend or offers educational opportunities for the I/DD staff.

CHOOSE A PHARMACY WITH EXPERIENCE & COMPASSION

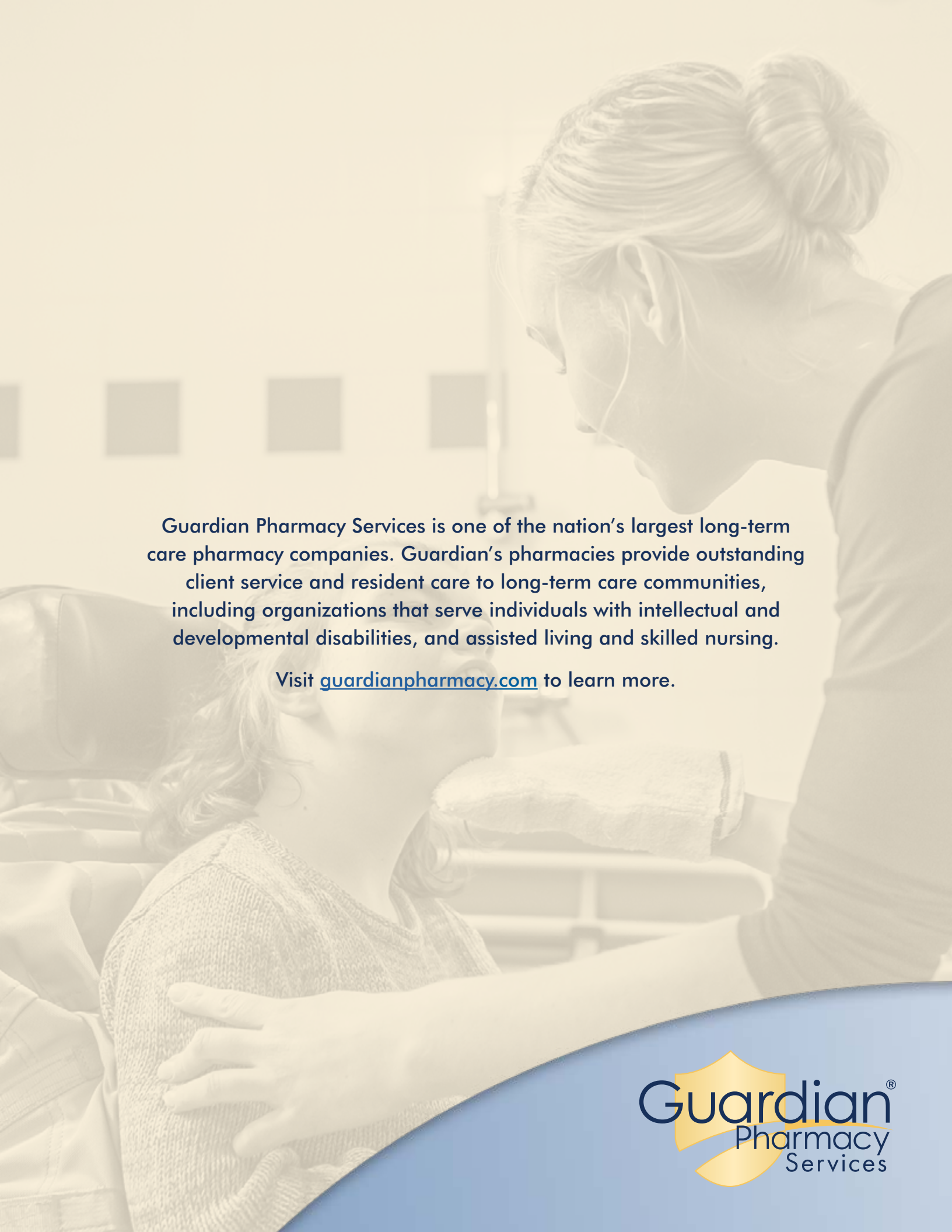
If you work with a pharmacy that specializes in medication compliance, you can minimize medication errors and billing complaints, leading to greater individual and staff happiness. Selecting the LTC pharmacy partner that shares the same level of enthusiasm and empathy you have for the residents you serve is equally as important. Build a relationship with a pharmacy that views meeting the needs of individuals with I/DD the same way you do – as a privilege and source of pride.



¹ Steven R. Erickson, Drita Nicaaj & Sasha Barron (2018) Complexity of medication regimens of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 43:3, 351-361, DOI: [10.3109/13668250.2017.1350836](https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2017.1350836)

² The Case for Inclusion 2020 Key Findings Report (Washington, DC: United Cerebral Palsy & the ANCOR Foundation, 2020, February 6)

³ Hewitt, A., Pettingell, S., Kramme, J., Smith, J., Dean, K., Kleist, B., Sanders, M., & Bershinsky, J. (2021). *Direct Support Workforce and COVID-19 National Report: Six-Month Follow-up*. Minneapolis: Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota



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