

**The Partnership for Safe Medicines** is a coalition of more than 50 patient, physician, pharmacist, university, industry and other professional organizations committed to the safety of prescription drugs and protecting consumers against unapproved, counterfeit, substandard, mishandled or otherwise unsafe medicines.

Learn more about the dangers of contraband and counterfeit drugs at [www.safemedicines.org](http://www.safemedicines.org) or contact us at [info@safemedicines.org](mailto:info@safemedicines.org).

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## Consumer Resources

In today's global environment, it doesn't matter if you live in the United States, Europe, Asia, or Africa—everyone is at risk from unsafe drugs. Counterfeit drugs defraud consumers and deny patients therapies that can alleviate suffering and save lives. Unfortunately, in some cases, these drugs have caused great harm and fatalities.

But there are ways to minimize your risk of getting a counterfeit medicine. Take a moment to learn more about how you can protect your family from fake drugs with these tools.

### *Real Dangers of Fake Drugs*

- **SafeMeds Tools:** The Partnership for Safe Medicines has several SafeMeds tools to help you stay up-to-date on what's happening here in the U.S. and other parts of the world regarding drug safety.
- **Spot the Fake:** The counterfeiters selling chalk (or worse) as if they were real drugs are very good. How good? So good that not even the experts can always tell the genuine drugs from the fake ones. See some examples of what actual counterfeit drugs look like.
- **S.A.F.E. D.R.U.G.:** This "how-to" guide helps consumers identify and protect against counterfeit medicines by showing patients how to judge whether their medications are safe and provides tips on what to do if a drug has been compromised.

### *How to Buy Medications Online Safely*

- **Tips for Safe Online Buying:** Learn why simply searching for "lipitor online" is likely to get you a dangerous counterfeit.
- **Warning Signs:** Just because a Web site looks good, doesn't mean it's legitimate. This checklist of warning signs can help you spot a rogue online drug seller.
- **Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS):** Learn why VIPPS certified online pharmacies are the safest way to buy medicine online.

### *Ways to Safely Save Money on Prescription Drugs*

- **Importing Danger:** Learn why once a drug is outside the strictly regulated U.S. distribution channel, there is no guarantee of its authenticity, effectiveness, or safety.
- **Safe Savings:** If you can't safely buy drugs from Internet pharmacies in Mexico, Canada, and elsewhere, how can you safely save money on your prescriptions? We have several helpful tips.
- **Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA):** Learn how PPA helps uninsured and financially struggling patients get access to nearly 500 healthcare and prescription assistance programs that offer medicines for free or nearly free.

## *SafeMeds Tools*

It doesn't matter if you live in the United States, Europe, Asia, or Africa—everyone is at risk from unsafe tainted or counterfeit drugs. Anywhere in the world, you can come across medicines seemingly packaged in the right way, in the form of tablets or capsules that look right, but that do not contain the correct ingredients and, in the worst case scenario, may be filled with highly toxic substances.

In some countries, this is a rare occurrence; in others, it is an everyday reality. These counterfeit drugs may be:

- Too strong or too weak
- Missing key ingredients
- Made with dangerous ingredients
- Contaminated with foreign, even toxic, materials
- Made in unsanitary or unsterile conditions
- Created using unsafe standards
- Improperly labeled, stored or handled
- Expired (out-of-date)

Counterfeit drugs are an enormous public health threat. The Partnership for Safe Medicines ([www.safemedicines.org](http://www.safemedicines.org)) has several SafeMeds tools to help you stay up-to-date on what's happening in the United States and other parts of the world regarding drug safety, including:

- **SafeMeds News Archive:** SafeMedicines.org maintains a comprehensive list of all relevant news stories from around the globe and is a great way to see the global dimensions of this problem.
- **SafeMeds Weekly Update:** Our free weekly email provides readers with a weekly roundup of what's happening around the world regarding counterfeit drugs, as well as the latest blog entry from the Partnership's experts. Check out past issues of the update in our email archive.
- **SafeMeds Email Alert System:** As part of the FDA's Alert Network, we offer this free email service that sends official alerts from the FDA and other government agencies around the world to anyone—private citizens, public groups, corporations, healthcare practitioners, associations—when specific counterfeit drug incidents are detected.
- **Safe Medicines Blog:** Our weekly blog provides regular, expert commentary from Partnership for Safe Medicines' board members Dr. Bryan Liang, Thomas Kubic, Dr. James Class and Dr. Marv Shepherd.

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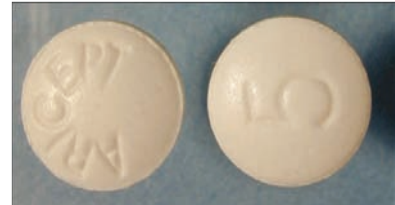
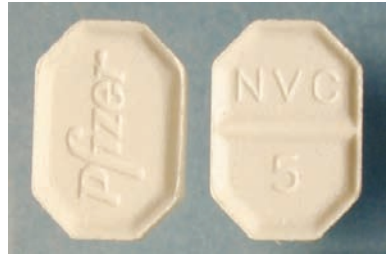
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## Spot the Fake

One of these medicines is fake. Can you tell which?

The counterfeiters selling chalk, powdered concrete, and boric acid (or worse) as if they were real drugs are very good at making their product look like the real thing. How good? So good that sometimes not even the experts can always tell the genuine drugs from the fake ones without analyzing its chemical composition.

Here are some examples of what actual counterfeit drugs look like. Notice how well counterfeiters package their products to look authentic.



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## Spot the Fake (cont.)

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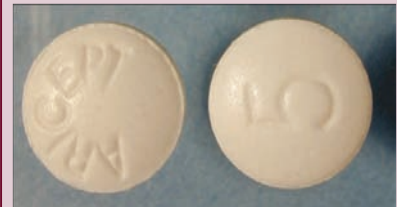
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One of these medicines is fake. Can you tell which?

### Approved



### Counterfeit



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S.A.F.E. D.R.U.G. is a "how-to" guide to help consumers identify and protect against counterfeit medicines. This eight-step check list helps consumers judge whether their medications are safe and provides tips on what to do if a drug has been compromised.

The S.A.F.E. D.R.U.G. guide was originally developed by Bryan A. Liang, MD, PhD, JD of the Institute of Health Law Studies, California Western School of Law and the San Diego Center for Patient Safety, UCSD School of Medicine, and refined with the Partnership for Safe Medicines.

The Partnership for Safe Medicines is committed to helping consumers assure that the prescription drugs they are taking are safe and effective.

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## S.A.F.E. D.R.U.G.

### *An 8-Step Check List for Medicine Safety*

**Sample:** Request a sample from your physician when you are first prescribed a medication to help you establish a "baseline" of a product's characteristics, including its appearance, taste, texture, reactions and packaging. If using the Internet to purchase drugs, make sure the Web site is a "VIPPS" fully certified site. For a listing of approved sites, visit [www.vipps.info](http://www.vipps.info). Please note that manufacturer samples are usually only available for brand name medications and not generic products. Generics may differ in shape or color but still be a safe and effective product. For specific questions on identification of medications, talk to your pharmacist.

**Appearance:** Compare the prescription medicine you receive with what it is supposed to look like by comparing pictures of the original manufacturer's drug and all associated packaging with the drug you are taking. You can also find pictures in the Physicians Desk Reference available at your local library and on the Internet. When comparing packaging, look for differences in paper, printing, color, and fonts (i.e., is it the same size, raised print, embossed, etc.).

**Feel:** Take note of the prescription drug's taste and any associated feelings once you take it. Is there anything unusual in your body's reaction compared to previous experiences, such as a stomachache or headache? Keep a diary of how you feel when you take your medications so you can compare.

**Evaluate:** Reflect on how your body has reacted over the course of the treatment. Do you feel that you are benefiting from the medication? Is your condition improving, stabilizing, or are you reverting back to ill health? Always ask your doctor or pharmacist what you should expect to feel when you take your medicine and when you should expect to begin feeling relief or improvement. Remember: counterfeit drugs can contain not enough, too much or no active ingredient.

**Doctor:** If your drugs do not seem to have the same taste or if you feel different than usual, immediately write down your symptoms and contact your doctor and pharmacist.

**Report:** If you have any concerns about the quality of your drugs, or have confirmed there is a difference in packaging, labeling, or pills, immediately contact the pharmacy where you purchased them. You may also want to contact the FDA and the manufacturer of the medication to report your concerns. The FDA can be contacted by calling toll-free **1-800-FDA-1088 (800-332-1088)**, or on the Web at [www.fda.gov/medwatch](http://www.fda.gov/medwatch).

**Unavailable:** If you confirm that your medicine is counterfeit, immediately remove it from your medicine cabinet. Mark the packaging with a red pen and put tape around the top of the drug container so that it will be unavailable to you or others in your family. Until you can send the suspect medication to the appropriate local law enforcement officials, or dispose of it safely, it is important that you and any family members do not confuse this medication with any legitimate prescription drugs you may be taking. Contact the FDA for more information.

**Gather:** Gather all the information you can find on how, where, and when you obtained the counterfeit medication and how long you have been taking it. Was it from the Internet, from a mail order, or from a local pharmacy? When did you purchase the medication? Do you still have the packaging? How long have you been taking the counterfeit drugs? If the medication must be taken routinely, you should also contact your physician or pharmacist to arrange for a checkup and a new supply so that you can resume taking your medication.

## ***Why Prescriptions Are Important***

*Our laws require that certain drugs can only be dispensed with a valid prescription because they are not safe for use without the supervision of a licensed healthcare practitioner. Before a healthcare practitioner issues a prescription for a drug the patient has never taken, he or she must first examine the patient to determine the appropriate treatment. Then the patient receives the drug from a registered pharmacist, working in a licensed pharmacy that meets state practice standards.*

*Web sites that don't require a prescription, or only ask customers to fill out a questionnaire before getting a prescription drug, bypass this in-person meeting and deny consumers the protection provided by a licensed healthcare practitioner. Unfortunately patients have died from purchasing drugs from online sellers that sold them without a prescription or through an online survey. These deaths may have been avoided if these patients had gone to their doctor to get a prescription drug.*

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## ***Tips for Safe Online Buying***

The Internet has made it possible to compare prices and buy products without ever leaving home. However, it has also made it easy for unscrupulous people to sell unapproved and counterfeit drugs to unsuspecting customers. These drugs may be:

- Too strong or too weak
- Missing key ingredients
- Made with dangerous ingredients
- Contaminated with foreign, even toxic, materials
- Made in unsanitary conditions
- Created using unsafe standards
- Improperly labeled, stored or handled
- Expired (out-of-date)

When it comes to buying medicine online, you can never be too careful. These tips from the FDA ([www.fda.gov/buyonlineguide](http://www.fda.gov/buyonlineguide)), the National Consumers League (<http://fraud.org/fakedrugs>) and the Partnership for Safe Medicines ([www.safemedicines.org](http://www.safemedicines.org)) will help protect you if you buy medicines online.

### ***Know Your Source***

Only buy prescription medications from a safe, reputable source that is properly licensed. Online pharmacies with the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy's Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS) full accreditation are the safest way to purchase prescription drugs online. No other accreditation or verification program for online drug sellers covers as many areas—or as thoroughly—as VIPPS. Among other things, the VIPPS criteria examine:

- Licensure compliance
- How the patient's or caregiver's identity is verified
- Patient medication consultation
- How medications are dispensed

Visit [www.vipps.info](http://www.vipps.info) to find a list of the safest online pharmacies.

### ***Protect Your Privacy***

Don't give any personal information, such as your social security number, credit card number, insurance information or medical history unless you are sure the Web site will keep your information safe and private. Look for privacy and security policies that are easy-to-find and easy-to-understand. Also, make sure that the site will not share your contact information with third-parties unless you agree.

See our **Warning Signs** information sheet for a checklist of warning signs that can help you spot a rogue online drug seller.

## *Warning Signs*

Purchasing drugs from online pharmacies can be convenient and economical. However, there are numerous illegal Web sites that will sell you contaminated or counterfeit drugs, or products that have not been approved by the FDA, deliver the wrong product, or take your money and never deliver anything in return.

The good news is that many Web sites for these fake pharmacies display warning signs. If a Web site exhibits any of the following signs, there is a good chance it is not legitimate and you should not buy your medications from it:

- No physical address or telephone number is listed on the Web site
- Does not have a licensed pharmacist available to answer your questions
- Does not have any way for you to talk to a person if you have problems
- Does not ask for the name, address, or phone number of your current doctor
- Does not require that you provide a valid prescription issued by your healthcare practitioner
- Offers to sell you a prescription or only requires you to fill out a questionnaire to receive a prescription
- Does not participate in any insurance plans and requires that all payments be made with a credit card
- Requires that you waive some rights before they send you the drugs
- Advises you about drug importation laws and why it is permissible for you to obtain prescription drugs from foreign countries via the Internet.
- Encourages you to have the drugs sent to post office boxes or other locations to avoid detection by U.S. authorities

Check out our **Tips for Safe Online Buying** section to learn how you can safely order prescription drugs over the Internet and [www.vipps.info](http://www.vipps.info) to find a list of the safest online pharmacies.

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*For more than a century, the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) has assisted its member boards and jurisdictions in the regulation of pharmacy practices.*

*Today, pharmacy boards from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, three U.S. territories, nine Canadian provinces, two Australian states and South Africa look to NABP to help develop, implement, and enforce uniform pharmacy standards to protect the public health.*

*NABP is proud to be a member of the Partnership for Safe Medicine.*

## *Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites Facts*

Since its inception in 1999 by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP), the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS) accreditation program has become the most trusted and respected means for the public to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate online drug sellers.

The VIPPS program and its seal of approval assures the public that VIPPS retailers are legitimate online pharmacies appropriately licensed in each state to which they ship pharmaceuticals. Additionally, VIPPS retailers have successfully completed a rigorous 19-point criteria review and on-site survey. It is the only verification program supported by both the Food and Drug Administration and Drug Enforcement Administration.

The VIPPS program is unique in that no other accreditation or verification program for online drug sellers covers as many areas as VIPPS, or does so as thoroughly. It is this criteria, and how it was developed, that sets the VIPPS program apart.

### *The Industry's Toughest Standards*

An online pharmacy must demonstrate compliance with a stringent set of criteria to qualify for VIPPS accreditation. Along with verification that the pharmacy is licensed in good standing by state boards, VIPPS' criteria include questions in 19 Internet and practice-based areas, including:

- How the patient's or caregiver's identity is verified
- Patient medication consultation
- Steps taken to ensure the patient's confidentiality
- How medications are dispensed
- How controlled substance medications are secured and tracked when shipped to the patient

The VIPPS program was developed by a coalition of state and federal regulatory associations, professional associations, and consumer advocacy groups. Because NABP accredits the online pharmacies based on criteria defined by regulators, consumers, and pharmacists, the public can rely on the VIPPS Seal to be assured that each patient receives the best in online pharmacy care. Currently, 15 pharmacy sites representing more than 12,000 pharmacies carry the VIPPS seal. Visit [www.vipps.info](http://www.vipps.info) to see the complete listing of VIPPS online pharmacies.

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## *Importing Danger*

The United States has one of the safest drug supplies in the world because its pharmaceutical supply system is "closed" to importation. Once a drug is outside the strictly regulated U.S. distribution channel, there is no guarantee of its authenticity, effectiveness, or safety. That is why, in virtually all instances, individuals are prohibited from importing prescription drugs into the U.S.

Drug importation supporters think that simply because drugs are purchased from "safe" countries such as Canada and Britain, they are actually made in those countries and are subject to strict regulations and oversight. But this is a dangerous misconception.

For example, if pharmaceuticals are not earmarked for Canadian citizens, they are not subject to the Canadian government's safety regulations. By marking the drugs "for export only," drug exporters can make Canada a post office box for fake or low-quality drugs from China, India, and other countries notorious for ineffective and sometimes lethal products.

Importing drugs from select European countries isn't any safer. The European Union's parallel importation and trade laws provide an opportunity for the inadvertent entry of counterfeit drugs into legitimate supply chains and markets. Counterfeit products that get into the legitimate distribution chain of one E.U. member can contaminate the distribution chains of other countries. Since 2007, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), Britain's equivalent of the FDA, issued half a dozen drug recalls after counterfeit drugs infiltrated its legitimate supply chain as a result of parallel trade (a practice in which products are diverted from their intended markets to sell in higher-priced markets).

In addition, the use of the Internet to purchase these drugs is a prescription for disaster. Major regulatory authorities in the U.S., Canada and the E.U., as well as the World Health Organization, warn that 50 percent or more of the products obtained from these sources are counterfeit.

Anytime consumers venture outside of the U.S.'s currently closed system, there is a very real risk to their health and welfare. The bottom-line is that drug importation programs, including state-government sponsored programs, encourage Americans to gamble with their health, especially vulnerable patient populations such as minorities, seniors, and fixed income patients.

Use the tips in our **Safe Savings** brochure to learn how you can save money on your prescription drugs WITHOUT the serious safety risks that accompany purchasing imported medicines.

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Americans are searching for less expensive medication, but also want assurance that the drugs upon which they rely are safe, untainted and regulated to ensure quality.

Recent reports show that Americans looking for better prices on prescription drugs don't have to look far. Smart shoppers with the right information can buy what they need at a more affordable price AND avoid the serious safety risks that accompany purchasing imported medicine.

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## Safe Savings

### *General Prescription Drug Savings Ideas*

#### **Ask About Generics**

Generic drugs offer significant savings over brand name drugs. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if there are any risks to you switching from your current prescription to a generic and if a generic medicine will work for you.

#### **Samples**

When your doctor prescribes a medication, ask if the office has any samples provided by pharmaceutical companies.

#### **Senior Discounts**

If you're 65 years or older, many pharmacies offer a 10 percent discount off the top. Be sure to ask about it.

#### **Ask About Options with Days and Doses**

You might be able to save money by purchasing a 90-day supply of your medicine instead of a 30-day supply. Also, your doctor and pharmacist might be able to prescribe higher-dosage pills that can be split. **NOTE: Never split pills without talking to your pharmacist!**

### *Compare Prices at Safe Pharmacies*

Many consumers are largely unaware that prices for medications differ from pharmacy to pharmacy, city to city, state to state. For patients taking multiple prescription drugs, take your entire list of medications to local pharmacies or call them to find the best total price at *one* pharmacy. It may take some time, but it is worth the wait. Using one pharmacy, and developing a relationship with your pharmacist, is the safest way to check for drug interactions, duplications and possible side effects—and get the best value for your money.

There are several Web sites available that make it possible to compare prices and buy products without ever leaving home. However, the Internet has also made it easy for unscrupulous people to sell counterfeit and unapproved drugs to unsuspecting customers. Buying online demands that consumer exercise a tremendous amount of caution.

#### **The Key to Safe Online Shopping**

If you are going to search for pharmacies on the web, always start by going to the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (VIPPS) Web page at **www.vipps.info**. The VIPPS seal is awarded to Web sites that have complied with criteria on patient privacy, authentication and security of orders, quality assurance, and provision of meaningful consultation between patients and pharmacists.

#### **PillBot**

PillBot was created to assist consumers in obtaining competitive pricing when shopping for online prescriptions and reviews deals from a variety of online pharmacies. **Make sure to choose a VIPPS-certified pharmacy!** Visit **www.pillbot.com** or call **1-800-505-7279** for additional information.

## ***You and Your Pharmacist***

*Prescription medications are invaluable products that affect how our bodies work. Making sure you are taking the right ones and taking them correctly is critically important. Sitting down with your pharmacist should be the first step to ensure the safety of your medicines. Your pharmacist can review prescriptions and help protect you from negative drug interactions. Pharmacists can also advise on possible savings, like determining whether generic medications are appropriate and whether there are “over the counter” options that can work for you. More safety information can be found at [www.aphafoundation.org/consumers](http://www.aphafoundation.org/consumers).*

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## ***Safe Savings (cont.)***

### **DestinationRx**

DestinationRx is drug price comparison Web site where you can search for the lowest price for your prescription medicine by zip code—**just make sure to choose a VIPPS-certified pharmacy!** Its therapeutic alternative tool can help you identify other medications available to treat your condition about which you can to ask your healthcare provider. Visit [www.destinationrx.com](http://www.destinationrx.com) for more information.

### ***Prescription Assistance Programs***

Patients don't have to turn to questionable online sellers to get the medications they need. There are hundreds of assistance programs to help patients obtain medications. These programs provide a safe alternative for patients who cannot afford to fill their prescriptions.

### **Medicare-Approved Drug Discount Card**

Today, seniors and people with disabilities can save an estimated 10-25 percent off the cost of their drugs with a Medicare-approved drug discount card. Some low-income seniors might also qualify for an additional \$600 benefit for purchasing prescription drugs. Call **1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)** for more information.

### **National Conference of State Legislatures**

More than 30 states have programs that will give you discounts on prescription drugs, often for free. Visit [www.ncsl.org/programs/health/pharm.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/health/pharm.htm) to learn more about the various programs state legislatures have developed.

### **Partnership for Prescription Assistance**

The Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA) helps match patients who cannot afford medication to prescription assistance programs that provide free or nearly free medicines to eligible patients. There are no charges associated with using PPA and almost all of the programs in our database offer their services free of charge. PPA offers a single point of access to more than 475 public and private patient assistance programs, including more than 180 programs offered by pharmaceutical companies. Visit [www.pparx.org](http://www.pparx.org) or call **1-888-4PPA-NOW (1-888-477-2669)** for information.

### **Rx Outreach**

Rx Outreach is a prescription assistance program for more than 55 pharmaceutical companies managed by Express Scripts Specialty Distribution Services, Inc. (ESSDS), a fully-licensed mail order pharmacy. The program offers prescription generic medicines to uninsured individuals and families, as well as those who have limited prescription drug coverage. Visit [www.rxoutreach.com](http://www.rxoutreach.com) or call **1-800-769-3880** to see if you qualify.

### **Together Rx Access**

Visit [www.togetherrxaccess.com](http://www.togetherrxaccess.com) or call **1-800-444-4106** to learn more about this free prescription savings program for qualified enrollees, which provides savings on more than 300 FDA-approved prescription drugs. Cardholders can generally save about 25-40 percent on medicines for common conditions including diabetes, hypertension, GERD, high cholesterol, cancer, allergies, asthma, arthritis and depression.

## *Partnership for Prescription Assistance*

*The Partnership for Prescription Assistance is the largest private-sector effort dedicated to helping patients find ways to access prescription medicines for little or no cost through patient assistance programs. PPA brings together America's pharmaceutical research companies and more than 1,300 national, state and local organizations, including the American Academy of Family Physicians, American Cancer Society, American College of Emergency Physicians, Easter Seals, National Association of Chain Drug Stores, United Way and the Urban League.*

*The PPA has state-based chapters in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. Additionally, two "Help Is Here Express" buses have traveled across the country, stopping in all 50 states and more than 2,000 cities, to educate low-income and uninsured patients about drug assistance programs.*

The Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA) helps uninsured and financially struggling patients who lack prescription coverage get access to healthcare and prescription assistance programs, many of which offer medicines for free or nearly free.

PPA provides a free, confidential, single point of access to more than 475 public and private patient assistance programs. Its member programs, including nearly 200 programs offered by pharmaceutical companies, offer more than 2,500 brand-name medicines and a wide range of generics.

PPA's Web site, [www.pparx.org](http://www.pparx.org), enables patients to find programs for which they may be eligible to apply. Patients can also call toll-free, **1-888-4PPA-NOW (1-888-477-2669)**, to talk with a trained specialist who will guide them through the application process. PPA's call centers accept calls in English, Spanish and approximately 150 other languages.

PPA also helps patients contact government programs such as Medicaid and Medicare and informs patients about free healthcare clinics in their communities. More than 40 of its member programs focus on the medication and healthcare needs of children. In fact, PPA has a dedicated a Web site, [www.kids.pparx.org](http://www.kids.pparx.org), to make it easier to learn about help available for children. Consumers can download and print patient assistance program applications from both Web sites.

While there are hundreds of assistance programs to help patients obtain medications, finding the right program has traditionally been a challenge. By acting as a clearinghouse of information about medication and healthcare assistance programs, PPA makes it easy for patients to find programs for which they may be eligible to apply.

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