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Specialty Pharmaceuticals Service

Medicare Advantage Plans: Specialty Medication Management, Contracting, and Manufacturer Engagement

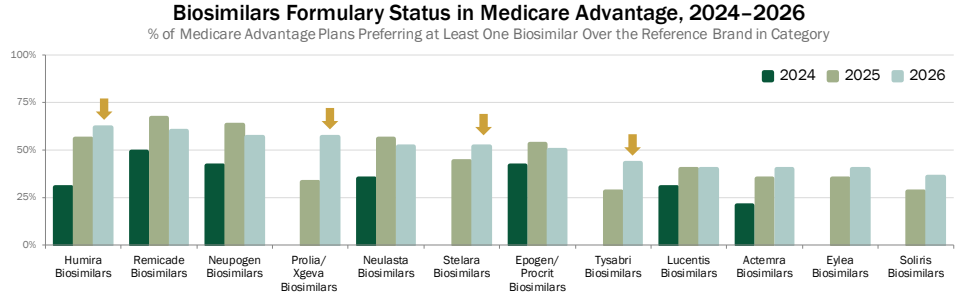
The specialty medication market in Medicare Advantage is undergoing a period of adjustment as evolving market dynamics introduce new considerations for health plans. HIRC's report, *Medicare Advantage Plans: Specialty Medication Management, Contracting, and Best-in-Class Manufacturer Engagement*, examines plan responses to the IRA, the UM tactics impacting seniors taking specialty drugs, as well as trends in contracting and best-in-class manufacturer support for specialty portfolios. The report addresses the following:

- How are MA plans responding to the Inflation Reduction Act's (IRA) Part D benefit design changes in the context of specialty drug management? What impact are Maximum Fair Prices (MFPs) having on the access and contracting landscape?
- Where are MA plans focusing their efforts to better manage the cost and utilization of specialty medications in 2026/2027?
- What is the current status of key formulary & utilization management tactics across top specialty therapeutic areas? What is the status of biosimilars adoption in 2026?
- What is the nature of the contracting environment for specialty medications in Medicare Advantage across 18 high-profile drug classes?
- Which manufacturers stand out as best in Medicare Advantage plan engagement to support their specialty portfolios?

Key Finding: The IRA is changing the specialty drug management and contracting landscape in Medicare Advantage; plans report more intense management and category reassessments as Maximum Fair Prices and biosimilar options expand.

Biosimilars Continue to Gain Ground

The percentage of Medicare Advantage plans preferring biosimilars over their reference brands increased in 2026 across a number of categories, such as HUMIRA, PROLIA/XGEVA, STELARA, and TYSABRI. Despite this, some plans report that STELARA's MFP prolonged brand preferences, highlighting the need to forecast further ahead for unintended effects of MFPs on overall formulary strategy.

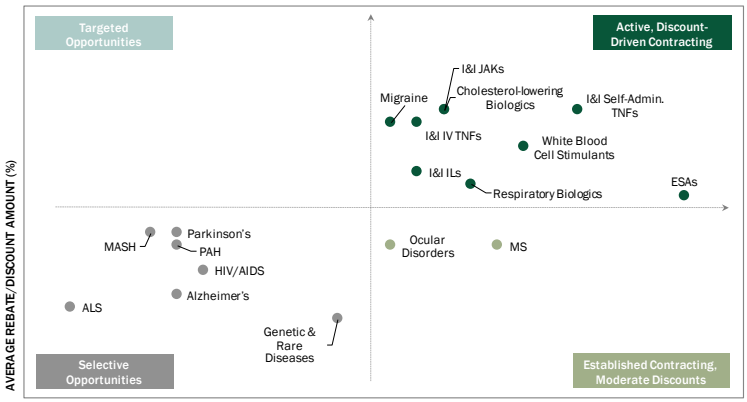


The full report reviews Medicare Advantage plans' specialty medication utilization management & formulary strategies in depth, from step therapy, formulary exclusions & preferred products to benefit design.

The Contracting Environment for Specialty Medications

Competition continues to be the primary driver of manufacturer contracting in Medicare Advantage, with greater activity in categories with biosimilars or strong brand competition. MFPs are reshaping specialty category economics; plans weigh negotiated prices against generic/biosimilar alternatives and established rebate arrangements, selectively adjusting product preference and seeking competitive offers from non-MFP manufacturers.

Contracting Environment in Medicare Advantage for Specialty Medications



The complete report examines IRA impact as well as contracting approaches and reported rebate/discount amounts across a listing of 18 therapeutic areas.

Specialty Leaders in Medicare Advantage Partnerships

Plans were asked to consider and provide a best-in-class manufacturer nomination across three key engagement parameters as noted below. **J&J Innovative Medicine**, **AbbVie**, **Amgen**, and **Pfizer** are consistently among the manufacturers nominated as best in 2026.

Leaders in Specialty Engagement with Medicare Advantage Plans

Ranked by Number of Nominations in Each Category

Overall Partner of Choice	Best-in-Class Programs/Resources	Most Willing to Contract

• J&J Innovative Medicine, Pfizer*
• AbbVie, Amgen, Merck*
• AstraZeneca
	• AbbVie
	• Amgen, Merck*
	• Genentech, J&J Innovative Medicine*
		• **Part D**
		  • AbbVie
		• **Part B**
		  • Amgen
		  • Pfizer

*Indicates a tie

The full report provides additional, detailed qualitative insights into leading manufacturers' support as well as factors that drive best-in-class nominations across categories.

Research Methodology and Report Availability

In August and September HIRC surveyed 42 pharmacy and medical directors from national, regional, and BCBS Medicare Advantage plans representing 23 million lives. Online surveys and follow-up telephone interviews were used to gather information. The *Medicare Advantage Plans: Specialty Medication Management, Contracting, and Best-in-Class Manufacturer Engagement* report is part of the Specialty Pharmaceuticals Service, and is now available to subscribers at www.hirc.com.

The Specialty Pharmaceuticals Service Examines the evolving market dynamics, stakeholder perspectives, and distribution models shaping access to specialty and biologic therapies. With feedback from payers and specialty pharmacies, the service benchmarks manufacturer engagement and contracting trends across top specialty therapeutic areas. For subscription information please contact:

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