

VITAL SIGNS

Moroom's Life Science and Healthcare Bi-Monthly Updates

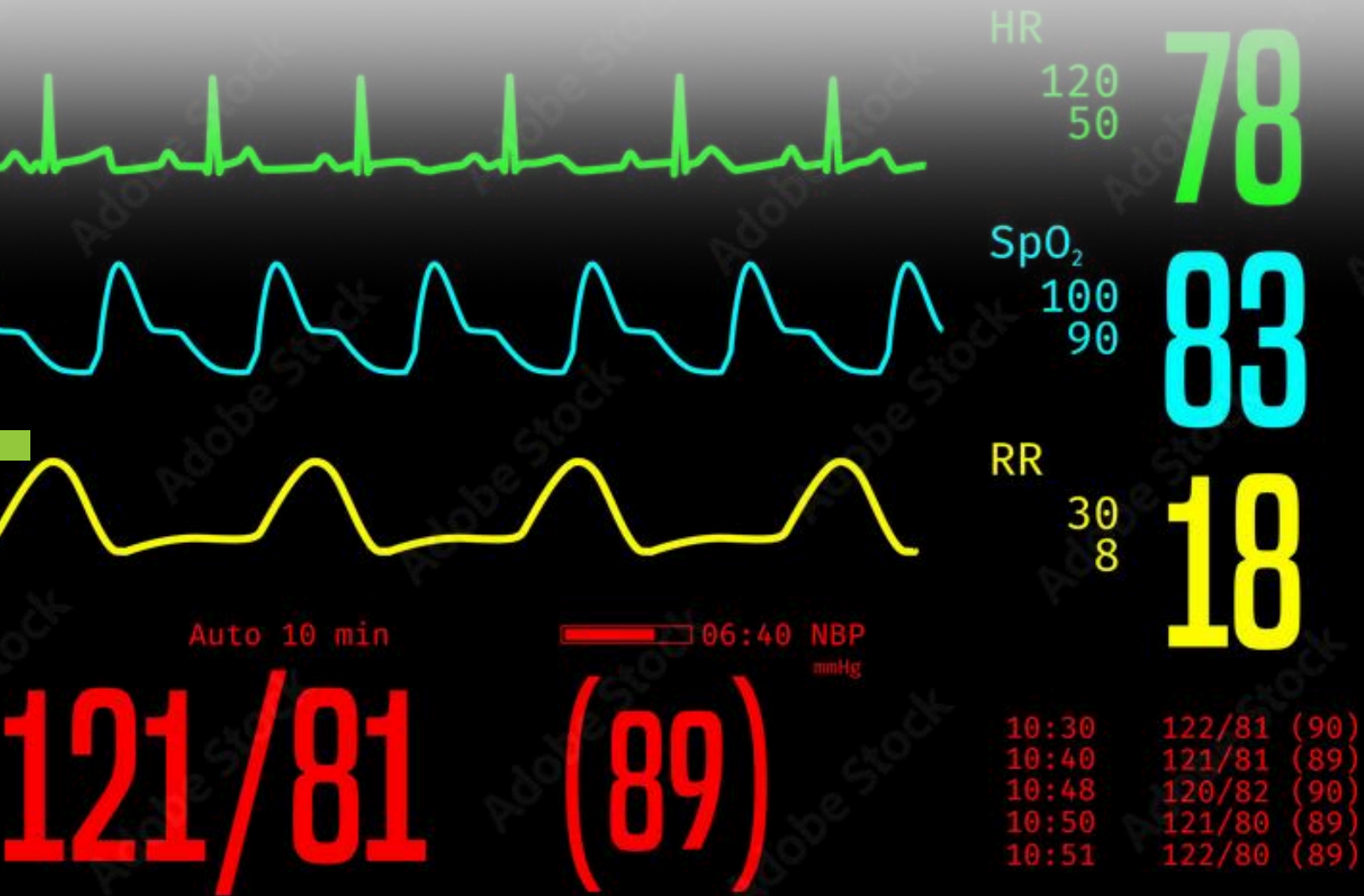


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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this edition of Vital Signs, your trusted update on key developments shaping Nigeria's healthcare and life sciences sector. This issue highlights a series of bold regulatory interventions and policy reforms aimed at strengthening governance, improving patient safety, and expanding access to quality healthcare across the country.

From the Federal Government's establishment of a National Task Force on Clinical Governance and Patient Safety to Lagos State's enforcement of mandatory social health insurance, the momentum toward universal health coverage and system accountability continues to build. At the same time, the launch of the National Electronic Pharmacy Policy (NEPP) signals a decisive shift toward regulating digital health services and addressing long-standing risks in pharmaceutical distribution.

This reform momentum has now extended beyond traditional health regulation into trade and industrial policy, with far-reaching implications for healthcare delivery. In April 2026, the Federal Government introduced a revised import prohibition list that includes several widely used pharmaceutical products, marking a significant pivot toward import substitution in essential medicines. The policy underscores a growing emphasis on domestic manufacturing capacity and reflects efforts to align health system resilience with broader economic and foreign exchange management objectives.

Across the sector, reforms are being driven at both federal and subnational levels, with notable progress in health financing, legislative restructuring, and public health regulation. However, these advancements are unfolding alongside competing pressures, including industry resistance to public health measures and persistent gaps in implementation capacity.

Together, the developments in this edition reflect a healthcare system undergoing significant transformation, one that is increasingly policy-driven, technology-enabled, and focused on delivering safer, more accessible, and equitable care for all Nigerians.

REGULATORY UPDATES



Nigeria Establishes Task Force to Tackle Medical Errors and Improve Patient Safety

The Federal Government has established a National Task Force on Clinical Governance and Patient Safety to strengthen clinical oversight, reduce medical errors, and enhance patient safety across Nigeria's healthcare system. The initiative, announced by the Coordinating Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Prof. Muhammad Pate, forms part of broader efforts to improve health outcomes nationwide.

The Task Force is mandated to develop and operationalise sustainable clinical governance frameworks, standardise patient safety protocols, and introduce accountability mechanisms across health facilities. It will also strengthen systems for reporting and responding to adverse events, while enhancing workforce capacity through training and oversight.

This development follows renewed concerns about medical negligence, particularly in light of recent high-profile cases and studies indicating medical error prevalence rates as high as 89.8% among practitioners. The Task Force is expected to operate initially for 12 months and will play a central role in aligning Nigeria's healthcare system with global best practices on quality care and patient safety.

Alcohol Industry Pushes Back Against Sachet Ban as NAFDAC Maintains Enforcement

A regulatory standoff is unfolding between the alcohol industry and the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) over the nationwide ban on sachet alcohol and alcoholic beverages in bottles below 200ml, which took effect on 22 January 2026.

While reports suggest that certain government actors have called for a suspension of enforcement due to economic and security concerns, NAFDAC has firmly denied receiving any such directive. The Agency has reaffirmed its commitment to the ban, emphasising its public health objective of limiting underage access to cheap and easily concealable alcohol products.

NAFDAC has already commenced enforcement actions, including the evacuation of non-compliant products and monitoring of manufacturers' compliance. The Agency cited data indicating that approximately 50% of underage individuals consume alcohol packaged in sachets or small PET bottles.

Stakeholders note that the long-term effectiveness of the policy will depend on preventing "packaging substitution," where manufacturers shift to slightly larger but still affordable formats. The situation represents a critical test of Nigeria's resolve to prioritise public health over competing economic interests.

Tinubu Transmits 24 Health Sector Amendment Bills to Senate

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has transmitted 24 health sector amendment bills to the Senate as part of ongoing efforts to reform and strengthen Nigeria's healthcare system.

The proposed legislation, developed following a comprehensive review of existing health laws, seeks to streamline governance structures across key health institutions by reducing oversized boards and improving operational efficiency. The reforms cover a broad range of institutions, including federal medical centres, teaching hospitals, regulatory councils, and specialised health agencies.

Additional bills include the **Records Officers Registration and Digital Health Bill 2025** and the **Federal College of Complementary and Alternative Medicine Bill 2025**, signalling increased attention to digital health governance and alternative medicine regulation.

The reforms are expected to enhance service delivery, improve institutional accountability, and align Nigeria's health governance framework with modern healthcare demands.

Nigeria Launches National Policy to Regulate E-Pharmacy Services

The Federal Government has inaugurated the **National Electronic Pharmacy Policy (NEPP)** and Strategic Implementation Plan, marking a significant step toward regulating online pharmaceutical services in Nigeria.

The policy establishes a comprehensive framework for licensing, accreditation, and monitoring of digital pharmacy platforms, addressing longstanding concerns around unregulated online drug sales, counterfeit medicines, and misinformation.

NEPP introduces real-time tracking and traceability mechanisms for pharmaceutical products, strengthens prescription governance, and promotes accountability across the pharmaceutical value chain. It also aims to expand access to safe and affordable medicines, particularly for underserved and remote populations.

Developed through multi-agency collaboration, the policy integrates contributions from regulators including the Pharmacy Council of Nigeria, NAFDAC, and key digital governance institutions. While stakeholders have welcomed the initiative, concerns remain around implementation challenges such as digital literacy gaps, infrastructure limitations, and compliance costs for smaller operators.

Lagos Begins Enforcement of Mandatory Social Health Insurance Scheme

The Lagos State Government has commenced full enforcement of its **mandatory social health insurance policy** under the Lagos State Health Scheme (LSHS), with the inauguration of an Enforcement Team to drive compliance.

The initiative operationalises the Ilera-Eko health insurance scheme and introduces strict compliance measures, including mandatory enrolment for civil servants and residents. Notably, proof of enrolment is now required for access to certain government services, and public sector employees risk salary withholding for non-compliance.

The enforcement will be implemented in phases, starting with Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), before extending to the wider formal and informal sectors. The government emphasises that the approach is not punitive but aimed at ensuring universal health coverage and reducing out-of-pocket healthcare spending.

The move positions Lagos as a leading subnational actor in advancing health financing reforms and could serve as a model for other states.

Nine States Meet Abuja Declaration Health Budget Benchmark

Nine Nigerian states have met or exceeded the 15% health budget allocation target set under the Abuja Declaration, according to a 2026 budget analysis by Promad Foundation.

The states, Abia, Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Ogun, Kwara, Nasarawa, Oyo, and Taraba, represent a significant shift toward increased domestic investment in healthcare. Allocations ranged between 15% and nearly 18% of total state budgets.

This development marks progress toward fulfilling a long-standing continental commitment, although the Federal Government's allocation remains significantly lower at approximately 4.2% of the national budget.

Experts note that sustained investment at the subnational level could improve healthcare infrastructure, workforce capacity, and service delivery, provided funds are efficiently utilised.

Nigeria Prepares Rollout of Long-Acting HIV Prevention Injection

Nigeria introduces **lenacapavir**, a twice-yearly injectable drug for HIV prevention, following regulatory approval and readiness assessments in multiple states.

The drug, recommended by the World Health Organisation in 2025, offers a long-acting alternative to daily oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), with clinical data showing up to 99.9% effectiveness in preventing HIV transmission.

The rollout is expected to significantly improve prevention efforts, particularly among high-risk populations who face challenges with adherence to daily medication. A recent price reduction agreement has also made the drug more accessible, with costs reduced to approximately \$40 per person annually for eligible countries.

The introduction of lenacapavir represents a major advancement in Nigeria's HIV response strategy and reflects growing adoption of innovative, patient-centred healthcare solutions.

FG Commends Plateau State on Primary Healthcare Reforms

The Federal Government has commended Plateau State for its progress in strengthening primary healthcare delivery through improved infrastructure, increased budgetary support, and expanded health insurance coverage for vulnerable populations.

The state has also demonstrated strong implementation of national health policies and reforms, including the National Health Fellowship Programme, which aims to build local capacity and drive community-based health interventions.

Officials highlight Plateau's focus on maternal and child health, data-driven planning, and community engagement as key drivers of its success. The state's approach underscores the importance of political will and local ownership in advancing healthcare reforms.

FG Bans Importation of Paracetamol, Metronidazole and Other Essential Medicines

The Federal Government has introduced a sweeping ban on the importation of selected pharmaceutical products under a revised import prohibition list issued by the Federal Ministry of Finance and dated 1 April 2026.

The directive covers commonly used medicines including paracetamol tablets and syrups, metronidazole, cotrimoxazole, chloroquine, aspirin, folic acid, multivitamins, and several topical antibiotics. Antibiotics such as penicillin and gentamycin, as well as ointments and other basic formulations, are also affected.

Under the new policy, responsibility for the supply of these medicines shifts almost entirely to local pharmaceutical manufacturers, reflecting the government's intention to deepen domestic production, reduce dependence on foreign exchange, and strengthen local industrial capacity.

The directive also maintains Nigeria's long-standing ban on the importation of pharmaceutical waste, reinforcing public health and environmental safety concerns.

COMMENTARY

Nigeria's healthcare sector is entering a critical phase of reform, marked by strong regulatory intent and expanding policy innovation. The establishment of the National Task Force on Clinical Governance and Patient Safety is a timely response to systemic issues of medical errors and weak accountability. If effectively implemented, it could lay the foundation for a culture of quality assurance and continuous improvement across healthcare institutions.

Similarly, the Federal Government's transmission of 24 health sector amendment bills signals a broader effort to modernise governance structures and improve institutional efficiency. By addressing longstanding issues such as bloated boards and fragmented oversight, these reforms have the potential to enhance service delivery and strengthen regulatory coherence.

At the intersection of public health and regulation, the ongoing standoff between NAFDAC and the alcohol industry over the sachet alcohol ban underscores the complexities of policymaking in environments where economic and health priorities often collide. The outcome of this dispute will likely shape future approaches to health regulation and enforcement in Nigeria.

Digital transformation also features prominently in this quarter's developments. The introduction of the National Electronic Pharmacy Policy represents a significant step toward integrating technology into healthcare delivery while safeguarding patient safety. However, its success will depend on the government's ability to address infrastructure gaps, enforce compliance, and ensure inclusivity for underserved populations.

At the subnational level, Lagos State's enforcement of mandatory health insurance demonstrates a pragmatic approach to achieving universal health coverage. By linking compliance to access to government services and employment benefits, the state is introducing a powerful mechanism for expanding coverage. If sustained, this model could drive similar reforms across other states.

Encouragingly, increased budgetary allocations by several states in line with the Abuja Declaration reflect a growing recognition of the importance of domestic health financing.

Meanwhile, innovations such as the planned rollout of long-acting HIV prevention drugs highlight Nigeria's willingness to adopt global best practices in addressing public health challenges.

The decision to prohibit the importation of essential medicines such as paracetamol and metronidazole represents one of the most consequential health-adjacent trade policy moves in recent years. Unlike previous import substitution efforts focused on finished consumer goods, this policy directly affects foundational components of routine healthcare delivery. Its success will hinge not only on industrial policy coherence but also on regulatory enforcement, quality assurance by agencies such as NAFDAC, and the ability of local manufacturers to scale production without compromising drug safety, affordability, or geographic access. In the absence of rapid capacity expansion, the risk of medicine shortages and informal market proliferation remains a critical concern.

Overall, while the policy direction is clear and increasingly ambitious, the persistent challenge remains implementation. Translating these reforms into measurable improvements in health outcomes will require sustained political will, institutional coordination, and robust accountability mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

The developments featured in this edition of Vital Signs underscore a healthcare sector that is actively evolving through legislative reform, regulatory strengthening, and targeted policy interventions.

From patient safety initiatives and digital health regulation to health financing reforms and innovative treatment options, Nigeria is laying important building blocks for a more resilient and responsive healthcare system. The growing alignment between federal and state-level efforts further reinforces the potential for systemic transformation.

However, the success of these initiatives will ultimately depend on effective implementation, stakeholder collaboration, and the ability to balance innovation with inclusivity. Ensuring that reforms translate into tangible improvements in access, quality, and patient outcomes remains the sector's most pressing priority.

Against this backdrop, the new pharmaceutical import restrictions underscore the growing intersection between health policy, industrial strategy, and economic reform, highlighting the need for careful policy sequencing to ensure that efforts to boost local production do not inadvertently undermine access to essential medicines or public health outcomes.

As Nigeria continues on its path toward universal health coverage and strengthened health governance, sustained commitment to accountability, transparency, and innovation will be essential in delivering a system that truly meets the needs of its population.

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