

Empowering women: Advancing female entrepreneurship in community pharmacy

Executive summary

2025



International
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Federation

Colophon

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1 Acknowledgements

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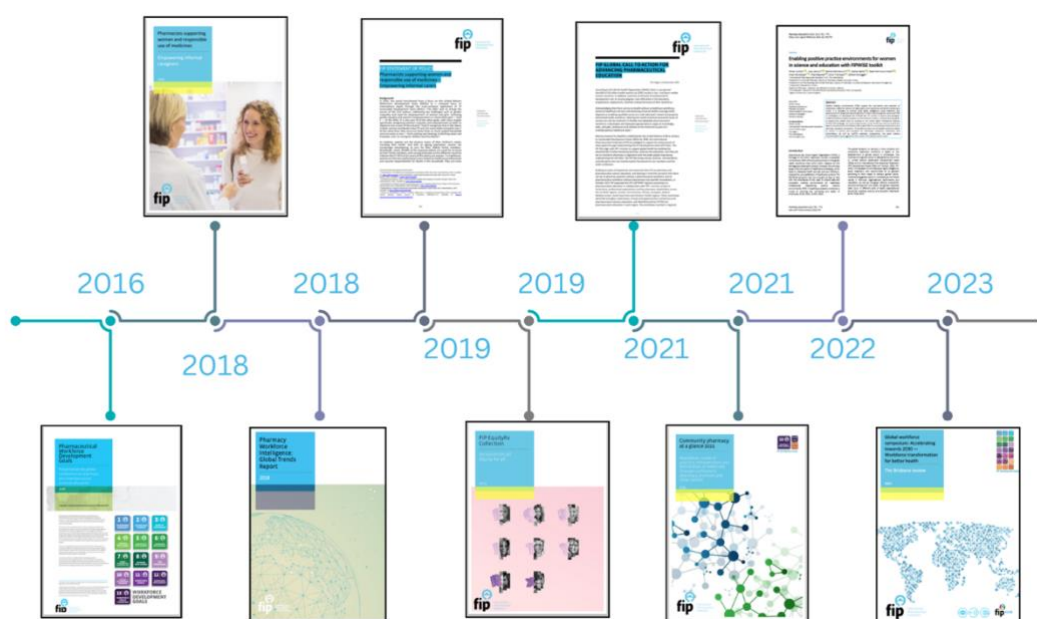
3 Background

The community pharmacy ownership sector has traditionally been male dominated, creating a persistent gap in gender representation among entrepreneurs in the field. While the pharmacy profession has made significant strides toward gender equality—with more women now entering and thriving in various roles within pharmacy—the entrepreneurial subset has not kept pace. The proportion of women owning and operating pharmacies remains comparatively low, suggesting the presence of specific barriers that hinder the transition from professional practice to entrepreneurship for many women.^{1, 2}

Numerous studies have explored these barriers and provided valuable insights into why they persist. Commonly identified challenges include limited access to start-up capital and financial backing, insufficient mentorship opportunities from established entrepreneurs, and enduring societal expectations that place an unequal burden on women when balancing professional ambitions and personal or familial responsibilities.^{3, 4, 5}

[FIP's Development Goal \(DG\) 10: Equity and equality](#) calls for clear strategies to address equity and diversity inequalities in pharmaceutical workforce development, continued education and training, and career progression. It emphasises equitable pharmaceutical service delivery and access to quality pharmaceutical care. Additionally, it promotes global equity in pharmaceutical sciences training, research infrastructure, development, manufacturing, and evidence-based regulatory oversight. Over the past decade, FIP has made significant efforts to advance equity and equality across all aspects of pharmacy by publishing reports, issuing policy statements, and launching calls to action to promote gender equity in science, practice and education (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Timeline of FIP deliverables on gender equity



In 2018, FIP launched a report titled [Pharmacists supporting women and responsible use of medicines](#)⁶ which focuses on the important role pharmacists play in empowering women, particularly as informal caregivers. It acknowledges the significant, often unpaid, contribution of women to global healthcare and the unique position of pharmacists to support them. The report discusses the challenges faced by women in accessing quality healthcare and the potential of pharmacists to improve health literacy and medicine use. This report was followed by [the FIP Statement of policy on pharmacists supporting women and responsible use of medicines](#)⁷ in 2019 and which includes recommendations on empowering informal carers, particularly women, who often undertake unpaid healthcare roles. It acknowledges the disproportionate amount of care work performed by women and the need for their empowerment, aligning with the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#).⁸

In 2018, FIP also launched the [FIP Pharmacy Workforce Intelligence: Global Trends Report](#)⁹ which provides an overview of global trends of the pharmaceutical workforce over the past decade, building on our previous reports on workforce trends. The report provides an analysis of the global pharmacy workforce, highlighting a projected 40% growth by 2030. It discusses the increase in pharmacist capacity, with disparities across regions and slower growth in low-income countries. The report notes a shift towards a female-dominated workforce, with women expected to make up 72% of the profession by 2030. It emphasises the need to address workforce capacity inequities to ensure safe and effective medicine use globally.

FIP launched the initiative [FIPWiSE](#) (FIP Women in Science and Education) in 2020 to help women in pharmaceutical sciences and pharmacy education achieve their potential and attract more women to these fields. It addresses gender inequities, promotes solutions, and highlights women's contributions, while fostering mentorship, collaboration, and leadership opportunities. Delivered as part of FIP's [EquityRx programme](#), it aligns with FIP DG 10 and the [UN Sustainable Development Goal 5](#) on gender equity.

FIP's [Global call to action for advancing pharmaceutical education](#)¹⁰ in 2021 called on academic institutions, professional organisations, policy makers and key pharmaceutical stakeholders around the world to provide enabling and equitable working conditions for the academic workforce, support gender equity and address inequities in education for students, and to ensure pharmaceutical education is grounded in human rights, based on principles of equity, equality and social justice, encompassing an ethic of care, reciprocity and solidarity.

Later in 2022, FIP launched the [FIPWiSE toolkit for positive practice environments for women in science and education](#)¹¹ which aims to identify and address inequalities in the workplace environments which affect women in pharmaceutical science and pharmacy education, with transferable learnings across the pharmaceutical workforce. The toolkit focuses on raising awareness and providing possible solutions for individuals, employers and institutions that can enable positive practice environments for women in pharmaceutical science and pharmacy education.

Most recently, in 2023, FIP launched the [FIP Brisbane Calls to Action](#)¹² following the 81st FIP World Congress in Brisbane, Australia, as a result of the symposium [Accelerating towards 2030: Workforce transformation for better health](#).¹³ Among the ten key actions identified, one specifically emphasises equity, diversity, and inclusiveness in the pharmaceutical workforce, recognising its critical role in achieving better health outcomes and a more representative healthcare sector globally.

In 2024, FIP and the FIP Community Pharmacy Section hosted an insight board "Empowering women: Advancing female entrepreneurship in community pharmacy" with the aim of gathering diverse perspectives and expert insights on the challenges and solutions related to advancing female entrepreneurship in this field. The board aimed to bring together diverse perspectives and expert insights to confront the challenges women face in this field and identify actionable solutions. The goal was to collect critical data to drive initiatives and policies that break down barriers and empower women to take on leadership and ownership roles in community pharmacy.

The expected outcomes included:

- A collection of detailed perspectives on the primary barriers and opportunities for women in pharmacy entrepreneurship;
- Identification of practical strategies to help women transition into pharmacy ownership;
- Foundational insights for creating an evidence-based position paper advocating for gender balance in pharmacy entrepreneurship; and
- Identification of resource gaps to guide further development, funding, and partnerships to support women entrepreneurs in pharmacy.

4 Key insights

4.1 Challenges women face in community pharmacy ownership

4.1.1 Cultural barriers

Gender biases and societal norms discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurship in community pharmacy, often reinforcing the perception that business ownership is a male-dominated field. Women may face limited social capital and networking opportunities, which restrict their access to mentorship, partnerships, and financial backing. Traditional expectations also place pressure on women to prioritise family responsibilities over career advancement, making it more difficult for them to commit fully to entrepreneurship. These constraints create additional barriers that may hinder women from pursuing entrepreneurship.

“Very often, certain cultures might see women as less capable or weaker and too emotional for these roles. They also might be seen as not capable to make decisions or take a stand when needed.”

“Cultural norms put women at a disadvantage when it comes to networking opportunities and peer support. This leads to lack of access to opportunities and funds.”

4.1.2 Systemic and regulatory barriers

Women may encounter systemic and regulatory challenges that make business ownership difficult. A lack of gender representation in decision-making bodies may result in policies and funding structures that often overlook the specific needs of female entrepreneurs. Bureaucratic and regulatory complexities, such as lengthy licensing procedures and administrative burdens, may create additional hurdles for women attempting to establish and sustain a pharmacy. Furthermore, unequal access to government grants and funding programmes may further exacerbate the disparity, making it harder for women to secure the necessary financial support to start and grow their businesses.

“Systemic barriers, such as lack of mentorship and male-dominated networks, are also issues. Because of the low level of female entrepreneurs in the community pharmacy space, we lack role models and the ability to create strong networks.”

4.1.3 Financial barriers

Access to capital was identified as a challenge for ownership. Women may face scrutiny when applying for business loans and may be less likely to receive financial backing. Additionally, in some regions, there may be a gap in financial literacy training due to not having access to the required education or resources to navigate financial decision-making effectively. Limited opportunities to enter pharmacy ownership through partnerships may also restrict women’s ability to acquire or invest in existing businesses.

“In Uruguay (and Latin America) women in general do not have access to capital and financial resources unless they have a connection to a male figure that can facilitate loans and support.”

“Limited access to capital and funding opportunities is also a big challenge. This includes limited access to loans, women having more difficulty securing business loans, a perceived lack of financial backing, or even gender biases that occur in funding.”

4.1.4 Difficulties in work-life balance

Balancing professional responsibilities with personal and family commitments remains a significant challenge for many women seeking pharmacy ownership. In regions with inadequate childcare support, women are often left to manage caregiving duties, reducing the time and energy available for entrepreneurship. Cultural expectations also place a disproportionate burden on women to balance household responsibilities with business ownership, making it more difficult to commit to the demanding role of a pharmacy owner. Without systemic support, such as flexible work policies or family-friendly business models, women continue to face obstacles in pursuing and sustaining pharmacy ownership.

“From the Indian perspective, they have the challenge of the pharmacy being away from home and the long working hours, leading to women being unavailable for personal life.”

“Family responsibilities and lack of childcare infrastructure is a challenge. As community pharmacies requires the pharmacist to be present at the business, the expectation on women in the household in child or parent care can be challenging.”

4.1.5 Women's lack of confidence in their abilities

Despite possessing the necessary qualifications and skills, women may struggle with self-doubt and imposter syndrome, which diminishes their confidence in pursuing pharmacy ownership. The absence of visible female role models in pharmacy entrepreneurship may discourage women from envisioning themselves as successful business owners. Additionally, it was suggested that women exhibit greater risk aversion than males, potentially leading to hesitation in making bold business decisions or investing in ownership opportunities. Addressing these psychological barriers through mentorship, leadership training, and advocacy initiatives may empower more women in entrepreneurship.

“I think women often perceive themselves to be a little bit more risk-averse compared to our male counterparts. This also impacts our ability and willingness to pursue entrepreneurial ventures. There's something we call the imposter syndrome, where we really internalise doubts about our competencies and our ability to pursue higher-level roles.”

4.2 Enablers to successful transitions to pharmacy ownership for women

4.2.1 Pharmacy education, mentorship programmes and postgraduate training

Strengthening education and mentorship opportunities was identified as essential for equipping women with the skills and confidence needed to transition into pharmacy ownership. Tailored postgraduate training programmes, leadership workshops, and mentorship from experienced entrepreneurs was recommended to provide valuable guidance and networking opportunities. It was identified that expanding these initiatives may help bridge knowledge gaps, empower aspiring female pharmacy owners, and create a supportive system for professional growth.

“Education is important. It helps women to be strong and confident. Pharmacy management and entrepreneurship must be updated in the curriculum to encourage women.”

“Several US pharmacy schools have developed career tracks in entrepreneurship. These are not necessarily focused on community pharmacy, yet they develop the skills needed to launch businesses.”

4.2.2 Community support

Strong community networks play a crucial role in fostering successful female pharmacy entrepreneurship. Peer support groups, women-led business forums, and local partnerships with other male and female entrepreneurs were identified to offer emotional and practical guidance, helping women navigate challenges and build sustainable businesses. Community-driven initiatives that promote women in leadership were also identified to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for female pharmacy owners.

“It greatly helps if the family or partner are her greatest fans and believe in her too! It is important to create fostering and nurturing relationships between such women and younger mentees. Male mentors that understand the strengths women bring to any organisation, and are not threatened, can also act as mentors and enablers.”

4.2.3 Financial scheme supporting entrepreneurs (legacy ownership and partnerships)

Addressing financial barriers requires targeted interventions, such as gender-inclusive loan programmes and investment funds specifically designed to support women in pharmacy. Encouraging legacy ownership models, where established

pharmacy owner mentors and transition businesses to female successors, may facilitate smoother entry into ownership. Additionally, fostering partnerships between women entrepreneurs and financial institutions can help bridge funding gaps and enhance financial literacy.

“Malaysia has started women entrepreneurship support programmes by providing funding.”

4.2.4 Workplace safety

Ensuring a safe and supportive workplace was identified as essential for encouraging more women to pursue pharmacy ownership. Implementing clear policies and fostering inclusive workplace cultures may enhance women’s participation and long-term success in pharmacy entrepreneurship.

“Promoting safety in the workplace is also an important aspect.”

4.2.5 Policies supporting a healthy work-life balance

Implementing policies that promote work-life balance was identified as important. Strategies such as flexible working hours, parental leave policies, and subsidised childcare services can enable women to manage both business and family responsibilities more effectively. Employers and policymakers must work towards creating inclusive workplace cultures that support gender-balanced leadership in pharmacy.

“There is a need to change policies focusing on taking care of children or parents that take some of women's time.”

“It’s important to emphasise the need for collaboration between policy makers, professional organisations, and industry leaders to destroy systemic barriers and create an environment where women can thrive as pharmacy owners.”

4.2.6 Advocacy and awareness campaigns on women leadership

Raising awareness on gender disparities in pharmacy ownership and advocating for policy reforms may assist in driving systemic change. Advocacy groups that focus on gender equity in pharmacy entrepreneurship may help build a stronger system for aspiring female pharmacy owners. Public campaigns and media initiatives that highlight successful female pharmacy owners may challenge stereotypes and inspire women to pursue entrepreneurship. Strengthening advocacy efforts at national and international levels may, in return, encourage governments and institutions to develop and implement policies that support women in pharmacy.

“Advocacy at the university level is important. This can be done by providing undergraduates with an alternative career pathway. This is being done in Malaysia via the Young Pharmacists' Group or pharmacy student associations with the pharmacists' society support.”

4.2.7 Data collection on gender breakdowns in leadership roles

Accurate and comprehensive data collection on gender representation in pharmacy ownership was identified as vital for identifying gaps and measuring progress. Establishing gender-disaggregated databases and conducting regular workforce studies can provide evidence to support policy interventions and funding decisions. Data-driven approaches can help track improvements, identify persistent challenges, and ensure accountability in efforts to promote gender equity in pharmacy entrepreneurship.

“There is a need for data to support the decisions of having more women in leadership positions.”

5 Strategic recommendations for FIP professional pharmacy organisations

The FIP insight board has identified key challenges, enablers, and strategies to support gender equity in pharmacy ownership. The following recommendations are grounded in insights gathered from the discussion and provide a structured approach for FIP and its member organisations to eliminate barriers, amplify opportunities, and advocate for policy change that enable more women to succeed as pharmacy entrepreneurs. Although these recommendations are organised by authority levels, we acknowledge the inherent overlap and interconnectedness between them. They are designed to be implemented both globally through FIP's coordination and support as well as locally by member organisations.

FIP driven initiatives:

Visibility and recognition

- Increase visibility of successful female pharmacy entrepreneurs through social media campaigns, industry events, conferences, podcasts, workshops, digital events and potential for leadership recognition (awards).
- Launch cultural awareness campaigns that celebrate women in pharmacy entrepreneurship and challenge gender norms.
- Introduce the FIP Women in Pharmacy Award to recognise and celebrate outstanding leadership by women.
- Encourage industry recognition initiatives that highlight female role models in pharmacy business.

Policy and advocacy

- Advocate for the implementation of gender equity policies, including gender quotas on industry and leadership boards, and regulatory bodies.
- Support policy reforms that ensure equitable access to entrepreneurial opportunities for women in pharmacy.
- Advocate for government-funded business grants designed specifically for women-owned pharmacies.

Member organisation (MO) driven initiatives:

Education and skills development

- Integrate business, leadership, and financial literacy and education via the pharmacy curricula and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes to equip all pharmacists, particularly women, with essential entrepreneurial skills.
- Provide targeted training in business and financial management to support women in assessing and managing risk effectively and as part of lifelong learning pathways in pharmacy.
- Establish scholarships and incentives, including government-funded grants, to support women pursuing entrepreneurial education or starting their own businesses.

Mentorship and networking

- Develop structured mentorship programmes that connect aspiring female pharmacy owners with experienced entrepreneurs for networking, guidance and confidence-building.
- Promote male allyship programmes that engage male pharmacy owners and leaders in mentoring and sponsoring women entrepreneurs.

Financial support

- Work with member organisations in nations, to partner with banks and financial institutions to establish dedicated women's investment funds, including low-interest loans, grants, and flexible financing options for female pharmacy entrepreneurs.

- Encourage suppliers and distributors to offer flexible payment terms to support the growth of women-owned pharmacies.

Work-life balance and care-giving support

- Advocate to expand childcare and carer support and family-friendly policies to ease caregiving responsibilities that disproportionately affect women.
- Promote cultural shifts that recognise caregiving as a shared responsibility rather than one that falls primarily on women to allow a better work-life balance for women.

6 Conclusions

The FIP insight board provided a comprehensive examination of the barriers, opportunities, and strategic solutions needed to close the gender gap in pharmacy ownership. While the profession has seen increased female participation in clinical and managerial roles, entrepreneurship remains an area where significant gender disparities exist.

Through this insight board, key challenges to women entrepreneurship in pharmacy have been identified, including financial barriers, cultural and societal expectations, systemic and regulatory hurdles, and work-life balance difficulties. It was raised that women in pharmacy face greater difficulties accessing capital, in some regions have limited networking and mentorship opportunities, and may lack opportunities for structured business, leadership and financial education and training.

This insight board has also highlighted potential pathways to change. It was suggested that by implementing targeted policy reforms, financial support initiatives, accessible mentorship and leadership programmes, and enhanced business education for women in pharmacy, we can create an environment where female entrepreneurs are empowered to own and operate their pharmacies successfully. Cultural shifts, industry-led initiatives, and strong advocacy efforts will also play a crucial role in enabling more women to take leadership positions in pharmacy ownership.

With a united global effort from policymakers, industry leaders, academic institutions, and professional organizations, we can cultivate a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable entrepreneurial landscape in community pharmacy.

FIP will continue the work on gender equity through the EquityRx programme and work with its members to drive meaningful action. The recommendations from this report will provide a focus for the Community Pharmacy Section to take forward these elements under the EquityRx programme and ensure women in community pharmacy are supported, enabled and championed. This insight board report lays the groundwork for a position paper that will serve as both a call to action and a roadmap for change, ensuring that women pharmacists worldwide have equal opportunities to thrive as business owners and leaders in the profession and will provide a blueprint for all structures and constituencies in FIP to do the same for women in the profession.

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