

# Walgreens launches a clinical trial business—but CVS is ahead of the game

Article

**The news:** Walgreens launched a clinical trial business.

- The retail giant's clinical trial platform will reach patients at home, in-person, and virtually.

- It aims to increase diverse communities' access and retention in sponsor-led drug development research, per a company press release.

**The problem with clinical trials:** Most patients don't participate in them because they're unaware that they can. And lack of participation is even greater for people of color.

- **Less than 4%** of US residents participate in clinical studies, per clinical trial database Phesi.
- And the majority of participants tend to be **white individuals (nearly 78% of the time)**, while **Black individuals are only represented 11%** of the time, per a 2021 JAMA Network Open study.

**Why Walgreens' plan could succeed:** It won't have trouble finding patients who are a good fit for clinical trials with its huge physical footprint and access to a ton of patient data.

- Walgreens has more than **9,000 stores**, and more than half are in underserved areas.
- It also received access to a ton of new patients through the **40 million COVID-19 vaccine doses** it administered, according to the company.

**CVS and Walgreens' rivalry heats up:** The two are going toe-to-toe on their primary care strategies, and it appears they're doing the same within the clinical trial space.

Similar to Walgreens, competitor CVS launched its own clinical trial business, Clinical Trial Services. It delivers research solutions to drug developers and contract research organizations (CROs).

- More recently, CVS doubled down on its venture by forging a partnership with clinical trial platform **Medable** to expand engagement for patients at **MinuteClinic** locations through Medable's clinical trial software.
- Medable lets users take online screening assessments for clinical trials. Patients can share dermatology images, diabetes blood tests, and genetic tests to determine their eligibility for a particular clinical trial—something CVS' current software doesn't offer yet.

**CVS has a card up its sleeve that Walgreens doesn't:** its insurance business, **Aetna**.

In addition to the **4.5 million patients CVS Pharmacy sees daily**, its insurance segment, **Aetna**, also serves around **40 million patients**.

- That could be a huge competitive advantage for CVS over Walgreens' clinical trial business.

- For example, unlike Walgreens, CVS could lean on Aetna to boost clinical trial recruitment through its apps and email marketing alone.

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**Leading Concerns for Technology Adoption at Clinical Trial Study Sites According to US Clinical Operations Professionals\*, Dec 2020**

% of respondents



Note: n=75; \*respondents are part of clinical research organizations, academic medical centers, independent sites, pharma, hospital/health systems, biotech, cancer centers, site networks, medical devices, and other

Source: Florence, "Clinical Trial Site Technology: 2021 State of the Industry Report," Jan 5, 2021

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