



Can DTC Advertising Withstand the Coming Policy Shift?

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With a new administration in office and drug pricing under national scrutiny, the future of direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising is facing a potential overhaul. From proposed legislation to growing state-level momentum, the pressure is rising—and marketers must be ready to pivot.

Even without formal rule changes, the signals are clear: pharmaceutical advertising is under the microscope. Brands that act now—shifting toward more targeted, flexible, and patient-centric strategies—will be best positioned to navigate what's next.



The Political Landscape: Pressure is Building

The most visible warning sign came in June 2025, when Senators Bernie Sanders and Angus King introduced the End Prescription Drug Ads Now Act, calling for an outright ban on nearly all DTC pharmaceutical advertising. While the bill is unlikely to pass, due to First Amendment rights protected by the Constitution, its message is loud and clear: DTC is a growing political target.

Meanwhile, other legislative efforts are gaining traction:



The **Drug-price Transparency for Consumers Act** would require price disclosures in all DTC ads—despite evidence that list prices often confuse rather than clarify.



The **No Handouts for Drug Advertisements Act** would remove the **tax deductibility of DTC spend**, making these investments costlier for pharma brands.

Across the country, **copycat state-level bills** are surfacing in places like Oklahoma, Texas, and Connecticut, proposing bans on prescription drug ads across TV, radio, and digital. Though none have advanced yet, they reflect a shift in public sentiment—and a potential domino effect.

Meanwhile, industry organizations such as the 4A's specialty group and the Coalition of Healthcare Communications (CHC) are actively engaging Congress, emphasizing that DTC advertising is essential for educating patients and empowering them to manage their health.

And while the **FCC traditionally has limited jurisdiction**, recent public health framing suggests it may explore **disclaimer or time-of-day restrictions** for DTC ads, adding further complexity.

What's Actually Changing Right Now

Although no national rules have been finalized, enforcement is already tightening:



FDA's Office of Prescription Drug Promotion (OPDP) has increased warnings targeting digital ads that overstate benefits or minimize risks.



In April and May 2025, multiple pharma brands received enforcement letters for violations in **web and social advertising**.



Legal interpretations are shifting as well. The Supreme Court's recent overturning of the **Chevron doctrine**—which gave federal agencies broad regulatory leeway—means courts may now scrutinize FDA actions more aggressively. Proposed changes to DTC could face immediate legal challenges.

At the same time, pharma ad spend is climbing. Q1 2025 saw a **4% overall rise in linear-TV advertising**, and the top 10 pharma brands boosted their spend by nearly **30% year-over-year**.

That disconnect—between rising investment and rising regulation—makes now the time for recalibration.

Why DTC Still Matters

Despite criticism, DTC advertising has long played a meaningful role in public health:



It **raises awareness** of conditions and available treatments.



It encourages **informed patient-provider conversations**.



And, importantly, it bridges **critical health literacy gaps**, especially for chronic or under-diagnosed conditions.

A 2024 MAGNA and DeepIntent study found **90% of HCPs** believe DTC ads improve patient understanding and prompt valuable dialogue. And pharma's \$30 billion in total advertising spend—\$5.2 billion of which went to national TV—reflects continued belief in its impact.

But that doesn't mean business as usual will suffice.

How Marketers Should Prepare

The smartest brands aren't waiting for new rules. They're already evolving their strategies across four key areas:

1 Upfront Planning with Flexibility in Mind

Media contracts must be more agile than ever.

- Build in cancellation clauses and force majeure protections
- Allow flexibility to shift between linear and digital formats
- Reposition corporate or disease-awareness messaging (less likely to face scrutiny) as the focus for linear investments

2 Precision Media Over Mass Media

Targeted engagement offers stronger ROI and better compliance positioning.

- Shift investment toward connected TV (CTV), programmatic video, and point-of-care media
- Engage high-intent patients at the right moment, with minimal waste
- Expand investment in streaming platforms, where impressions now account for nearly 14% of all TV ad activity

3 Authentic, Patient-First Storytelling

Build trust by showing up with empathy and clarity.

- Activate influencer campaigns in condition areas like mental health to scale reach compliantly
- Partner with advocacy groups to boost message credibility and reach underserved patient communities

4 Immersive + AI-Powered Experiences

DTC must go beyond 30-second spots to meet today's content expectations.

- Leverage interactive tools: podcasts, digital explainers, symptom checkers
- Explore compliant voice experiences via Alexa, Siri, and Google
- Create educational microsites and modular content tailored to patient behavior
- Leverage the FDA's 2025 AI guidance to test innovative content formats that prioritize clear, balanced, and conspicuous communication

These strategies aren't just short-term fixes—they're long-term shifts in how we reach, educate, and support patients. The brands that start adapting now will be better equipped to lead in a redefined, more resilient DTC landscape.

Redefining the Future of DTC

A sweeping federal ban remains unlikely—thanks to longstanding First Amendment protections—but that doesn't mean brands are in the clear. The regulatory ground is shifting, and legal precedent alone won't protect outdated media strategies.

DTC isn't disappearing. It's being redefined. The brands that succeed will be those that act early, think holistically, and lead with transparency.

This moment isn't just about policy. It's about possibility. And the future of pharma marketing will belong to those who know how to navigate both.



Let's Talk

Ready to evolve your DTC strategy for what's next?

We're helping clients reimagine their media mix, stay ahead of regulatory shifts, and build smarter, patient-first engagement plans.

Let's connect on how we can do the same for your brand.

Reach out to:



Debbie Renner

CEO,
SSCG Media Group
Coalition for Healthcare
Communication Board Member
drenner@omc.com



Roshen Mathew

Chief AI & Innovation Officer,
SSCG Media Group
roshen.mathew@omc.com