

In recent years, medical cannabis has made headlines across the UK as a potential treatment for various conditions, ranging from chronic pain to epilepsy. However, despite its high profile, prescribed cannabis-based medicines remain largely a private healthcare phenomenon rather than an NHS norm. This raises several questions: Why is private medical cannabis the default route? What role does the NHS play in prescribing such treatments? And how should patients prepare for the ongoing treatment costs involved?

In this comprehensive guide, we'll explore the UK healthcare landscape around cannabis-based medicines, dissect the complex cost structures, and suggest practical ways to approach private providers — all contextualised through official NICE guidance and other authoritative sources.

The UK Healthcare System: A Parallel Model of NHS and Private Treatments

The UK prides itself on the National Health Service (NHS), a taxpayer-funded healthcare system providing care mostly free at the point of use. Yet, alongside this public network exists a substantial private healthcare sector — a parallel system offering quicker access, broader treatment options, and often personalised care.

Prescribed cannabis-based medicines exemplify this duality. While legally available on prescription, NHS prescriptions for these treatments are relatively rare due to strict clinical guidelines, limited evidence thresholds, and cost considerations. Consequently, most patients seek cannabis-based medicines via private clinics, where access is faster, and the range of options broader.

Why Does NHS Prescribing Remain Rare for Cannabis-Based Medicines?

NICE (the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) sets the evidence-based clinical guidelines that influence NHS prescribing decisions. In its recent updates, including the latest NICE guidance, the organisation emphasises rigorous thresholds for clinical effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis.

- **Limited evidence:** Cannabis-based medicines currently have a restricted evidence base for many indications.
- **Strict indications:** NHS prescribing is focused largely on specific cases such as rare forms of epilepsy (e.g., Dravet syndrome and Lennox-Gastaut syndrome) where clinical trials demonstrate clear benefits.
- **Cost control:** NHS budget constraints prioritise treatments with proven value for money across the population.

This means that for many potential candidates, NHS access is either unavailable or very slow, prompting patients to explore private medical cannabis alternatives.

[subscription healthcare plan uk](#)

Understanding the Four Cost Categories for Medical Cannabis Treatment

Whether considering NHS or private routes, it's essential to grasp the full financial implications of prescribed cannabis-based medicines. Unlike a simple one-off prescription, treatment costs unfold across several categories. Viewing these through a 12-month total cost lens helps patients budget accurately and avoid surprises.

Cost Category	Description	Typical Examples	Private vs NHS Context
Diagnostics	Initial assessments, tests, and eligibility checks before prescription.	Blood tests, clinical evaluations, medical history reviews.	Usually bundled in

private provider consultation fees; NHS diagnostics typically included in general care. Episodic Costs One-off or occasional treatments, such as short-term prescription changes or specialist reviews. Follow-up consultations, prescription adjustments. Private clinics often charge per visit; NHS episodic costs absorbed within service provision. Insurance-Style Costs Costs covering access to ongoing consultation, support, and emergency services. Membership or subscription fees for continuous care. Less common in NHS; private providers may bundle ongoing support into subscription or retainer models. Ongoing Treatment Costs Medication fees and continuous supply charges over time. Cannabis-based medicine prescriptions, repeat dispensing costs. NHS prescriptions usually cover medication; private patients pay directly, sometimes at premium rates.

How to Make Like-for-Like Comparisons: The Importance of 12-Month Total Cost Thinking

Many patients are drawn in by headline consultation fees or “from” pricing. However, these figures often exclude ongoing medicine costs or subscription-like charges, creating a misleading impression of affordability. As a personal finance writer and founder of [SavingTool.co.uk](https://www.savingtool.co.uk), I always recommend converting all costs into their annual equivalents. This approach reveals the true financial commitment involved.

Practical Steps to Calculate Your Annual Outlay

1. **List all fees:** Include consultation fees, initial diagnostics, prescription costs per month, and any monthly support or subscription fees.
2. **Convert to annual figures:** Multiply monthly or episodic fees by 12 (or the relevant period) to get a 12-month total.
3. **Watch for hidden extras:** Ask providers if prescriptions or follow-ups carry additional costs beyond initial quotes.
4. **Compare apples to apples:** Ensure all providers’ quotes cover the same service levels—for example, monthly consultations vs annual check-ins.

Using this methodology, patients can avoid the pitfall of being lured by a “cheap” consultation fee only to face recurring charges that escalate their expenses considerably over time.

Subscription Bundles vs Itemised Pricing: What Should Patients Expect?

Private medical cannabis providers often employ subscription packages. These bundles might include a certain number of consultations, priority access, and sometimes medication delivery. While these offerings can provide convenience, they often obscure the precise costs of individual elements.

Why I dislike vague pricing like ‘from’ or ‘starting at’: Without knowing what is truly included, patients risk signing up for expensive plans that may not match their needs or financial capability. A subscription bundle could hide costly add-ons or require long-term commitment before you can cancel.

Contrast this against itemised pricing, where each service and medication is priced separately. Though this method requires more effort to track and budget, it offers transparency and control over your spending.

Questions to Ask Private Cannabis Clinics

Before committing to a provider, make sure your shortlist (for example, found on [cannabisclinic.co.uk](https://www.cannabisclinic.co.uk)) passes these checks:

- What is the total cost for an initial year, including all consultations, prescriptions, and diagnostics?
- Are there any mandatory subscription fees or bundled costs, and what exactly do they cover?
- How frequently are follow-up visits required, and what charges apply?
- Are prescriptions delivered, and is there a delivery fee?
- What happens if treatment needs to be paused or stopped — is there a cancellation policy?

By having these questions ready, you avoid the disappointment of unwelcome surprises and can budget more effectively.

The Ongoing Treatment Costs: What You Really Pay For

Medical cannabis medications are usually dispensed on a repeat basis, often monthly, depending on your treatment plan. NHS prescriptions are typically subsidised, but for the few cases where cannabis-based medicines are prescribed, patients may still incur prescription charges unless exempt.

You know what's funny? private patients shoulder full medication costs, which vary widely depending on the product, dosage, and supplier. Monthly medicine costs can range from £100 to several hundred pounds — a significant ongoing financial commitment. This is separate from consultation or subscription fees.

So it's vital not to focus solely on the initial consultation price. When evaluating a provider, always obtain a clear estimate of monthly medication costs and add these to your 12-month total expenses.

Summary: Navigating the Private Medical Cannabis Landscape in the UK

In summary:

- **Private access dominates due to NHS prescribing rarity**, driven by NICE's strict evidence and cost thresholds limiting widespread NHS availability.
- **The cost structure is multi-layered**: diagnostics, episodic appointments, insurance-like care, and ongoing medication all add up to a significant yearly spend.
- **Thinking annually and comparing like-for-like prevents billing shocks**, a method that leads to better budgeting and provider choice.
- **Be wary of subscription bundles that obscure individual costs**. Always demand transparent pricing and ask a shortlist of detailed questions before committing.

For those exploring prescribed cannabis-based medicines in the UK, embracing these insights will empower better financial decisions—helping you avoid pitfalls and secure effective treatment without unwelcome surprises.



For further information, consult resources such as the NICE guidance pages and trusted clinic directories like cannabisclinic.co.uk.

