

# A lens on the transition

## Trends shaping the future economy

Impax's analysis of key sustainability themes and sectoral shifts



Sector in focus:  
**Healthcare**

## Sustainability and thematic perspectives

In this paper, we summarise our sector experts' views on key themes disrupting the **Healthcare sector** and their impact across a set of sub-industries.



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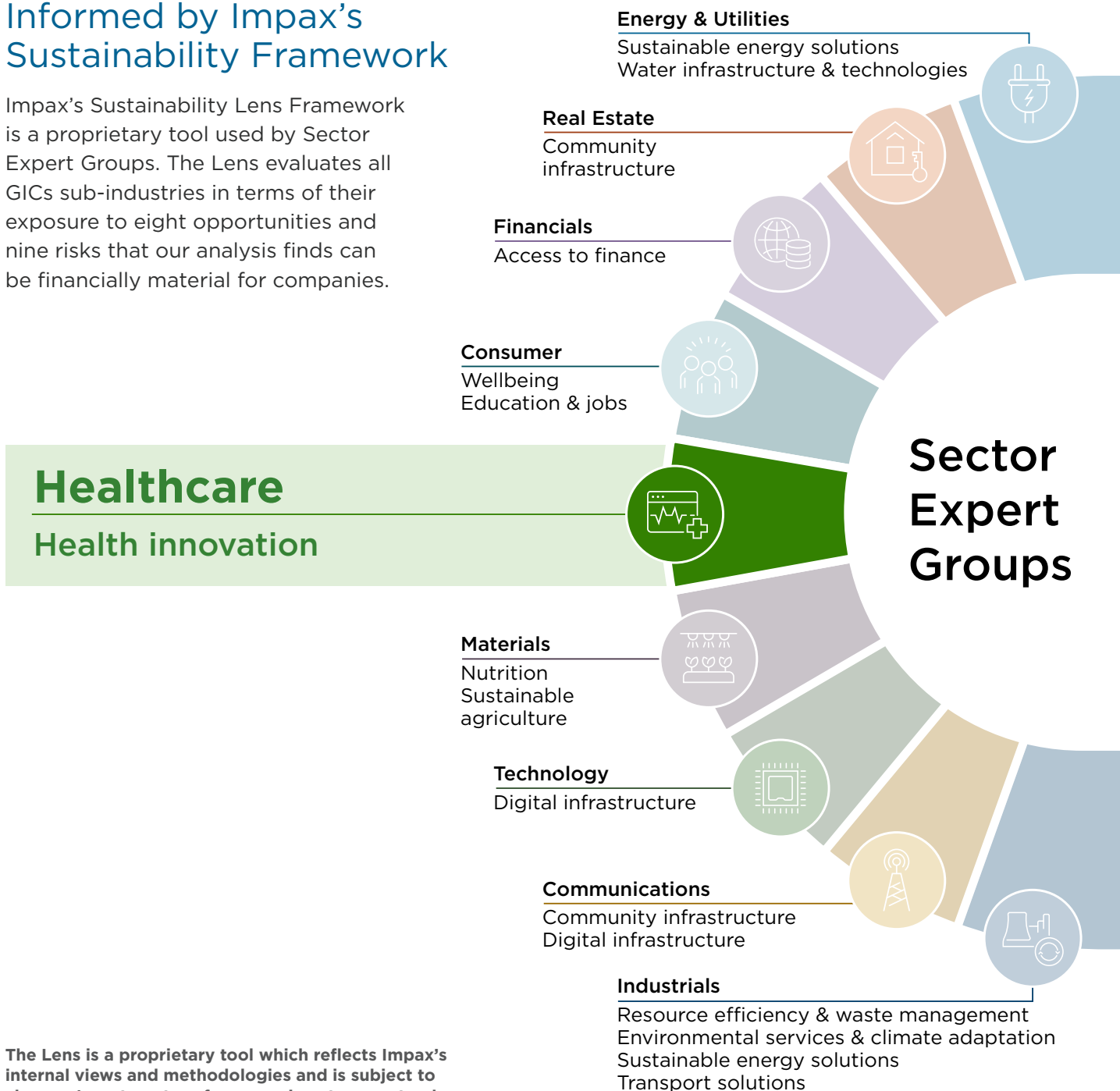
# Themes in the transition

## Views built on sector expertise

Impax Sector Expert Groups, comprised of fundamental analysts from both Listed Equities and Fixed Income, meet regularly to discuss and debate investment ideas, views and themes across the sector. Every 18 months, each Sector Expert Group provides a formal review of the medium-term sustainability-related opportunities and risks facing their investment universe in collaboration with the Impax Sustainability Centre. These reviews analyse the emerging issues, risks and opportunities that are affecting the sector and the evolving role of the sector and related sub-industries in the transition to a more sustainable economy.

## Informed by Impax's Sustainability Framework

Impax's Sustainability Lens Framework is a proprietary tool used by Sector Expert Groups. The Lens evaluates all GICs sub-industries in terms of their exposure to eight opportunities and nine risks that our analysis finds can be financially material for companies.



The Lens is a proprietary tool which reflects Impax's internal views and methodologies and is subject to change. Investment performance is not guaranteed.



# The transition today: what we're watching across sectors

Before diving into our review of the Healthcare sector, here are some highlights from recent discussions concerning the global economy at-large.

Our sector groups analyse how each sectoral transition is being impacted by multiple drivers, meeting regularly to discuss emerging and evolving shifts driven by:

Technology

Consumer

Policy

Societal shifts

## Disruption from artificial intelligence (AI)

Technology

The market is closely watching which sectors will be disrupted by AI. The release of new large language models (LLMs) capable of undertaking professional tasks has heightened expectations of labour market disruption and fuelled concerns about the durability of business models across industries ranging from software to real estate. Among S&P 500 CEOs, nearly 75% recognise that AI is financially material to their business models, yet far fewer feel adequately prepared to manage the risks associated with adopting AI or the competitive risks posed by AI-driven disruption.<sup>1</sup>

Assessing a company's long term opportunities in this context requires an evaluation of both the likelihood of disruption – driven by potential for revenue substitution, margin compression and durability of competitive moats – and the organisation's preparedness for that disruption.

In 2025, we conducted the first phase of an engagement on AI governance, with key findings published [in a recent blog](#). As we broaden this engagement, we are also deepening our focus on tracking returns on investment and fostering cultural readiness, ensuring companies can both manage AI-related risks and position themselves to create long-term value.

## Recommerce platforms tap into of a new generation

Consumer

Consumer behaviour is undergoing a profound structural shift, driven by increasingly digital lifestyles and a steady reallocation of spending from goods toward services and experiences. Generation Z (born between 1996 and 2010) is at the forefront of this evolution. Already projected to become both the wealthiest and largest generation in history, their preferences are reshaping consumer markets.<sup>2</sup>

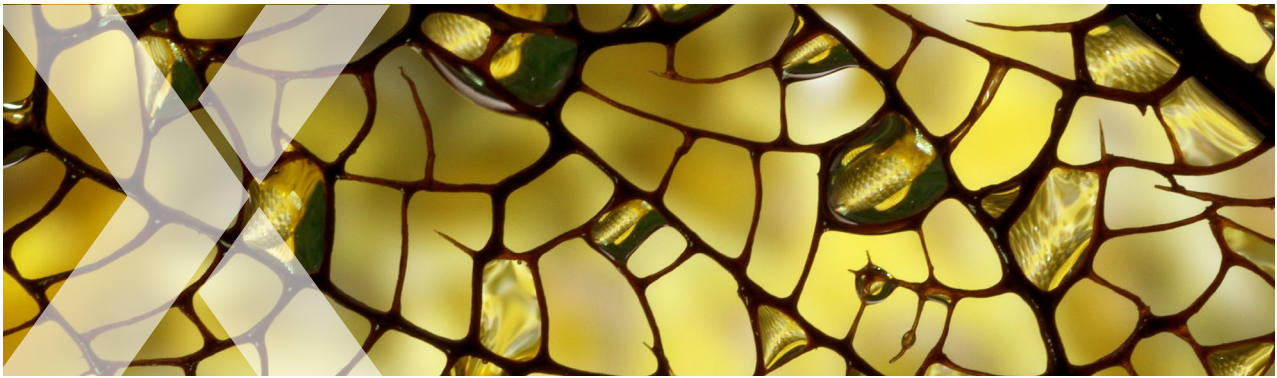
Despite younger generations' relative ambivalence towards buying new goods, one segment of goods-related digital consumption appears to be flourishing: recommerce, or the resale of previously owned, new or used products. According to EY, 38% of consumers intend to purchase more second-hand items.<sup>3</sup> Platforms such as eBay illustrate how technology-enabled marketplaces are supporting more circular consumption models while generating both financial value and income opportunities for sustainability-minded and price-sensitive buyers. We are focused on the durability of platform economics – including take rate stability, advertising monetisation and the increasing importance of scale advantages.

1 The Conference Board, October 2025: New Study: 7 in 10 Big US Companies Report AI Risks in Public Disclosures

2 McKinsey, June 2025: State of the Consumer trends report 2025

3 EY, 2023: When consumers want less but demand more, how will your business grow?

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## The future of emissions trading

### Policy

Europe is entering a fundamentally more stringent carbon regulatory regime, as free EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) allowances are phased out to 2034 and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) introduces equivalent carbon costs on imported goods. Under current policies, BNEF projects carbon prices could nearly double by 2030.<sup>4</sup> These policies impact the economics of heavily-emitting industries, like the cement sector, where they elevate barriers to entry and effectively ensure carbon is the structural price floor. This should benefit cement companies which have invested in decarbonisation.

Regulatory risk remains the key swing factor, however. Upcoming milestones – the March product benchmark and CBAM review, followed by the July EU ETS review – could materially influence the trajectory of carbon costs faced by both industry and the power sector. It is critical to evaluate all scenarios, including a case where there is a potential extension of free allowances to 2039 and longer auctioning timelines. This would improve short term cash flow for ETS-covered sectors but would slow the pace of margin expansion and delay consolidation benefits for the industry. For the power sector, an easing of the ETS could be deflationary for power prices.

## Affordability concerns ahead of US mid-terms

### Societal shifts

There is a growing societal battle over the affordability of basic utilities (water, gas and electricity) and who needs to contribute to infrastructure costs. While often framed as a national issue, affordability pressures are highly state-specific and increasingly shaping local regulatory dynamics. Residential electricity bills have risen by 27% between 2019 and 2025, and in several states – notably California and the Northeast – have outpaced both inflation and wage growth.<sup>5</sup> Multiple factors underpin these trends, including the growing costs of extreme weather events, sustained grid hardening and modernisation, and rising demand.<sup>6</sup>

Against this backdrop, voters, policymakers and regulators are focusing on the fairness of cost allocation, recovery pacing and allowed returns. While this does not represent a nationwide reset of utility economics, it is increasing regulatory dispersion risk. In jurisdictions facing acute affordability concerns – particularly those with rates under review – state legislatures and utility commissions have signalled greater scrutiny on return on equity and capital programme approvals. For investors, this creates a more complex regulatory landscape and raises the likelihood of diverging outcomes across states.

<sup>4</sup> BloombergNEF, March 2025: Europe's New Emissions Trading System Expected to Have World's Highest Carbon Price in 2030 at €149

<sup>5</sup> Wisner, R. et al., December 2025: Factors influencing recent trends in retail electricity prices in the United States. *The Electricity Journal*

<sup>6</sup> Charles River Associates, February 2026: US retail electricity rate trends analysis

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# Sector in focus: Healthcare

Sustainability **opportunities** include:

## Healthcare Access and Innovation, Improved Wellbeing and Resource Efficiency.

At its core, the healthcare sector is highly aligned with the opportunity to improve wellbeing and access to healthcare through preventative care and innovation. Reducing the cost burden of preventive care is a rising priority as ageing populations and climate related illnesses widen affordability and coverage gaps. At the same time, innovation remains a core growth engine: advances in medical technology – from AI enabled diagnostics to productivity enhancing clinical tools – are improving efficiency, mitigating workforce shortages and lowering system wide costs. As AI adoption accelerates, healthcare equipment and technology providers are particularly well positioned to benefit from greater clinical productivity and operational efficiency. Together, these trends create a broadening set of opportunities for companies enabling more accessible, efficient and resource effective healthcare systems.

Sustainability **risks** typically include:

## Anti-trust and Government Regulation, Product Liabilities and Pollution and Waste Externalities.

The healthcare sector continues to face elevated product liability and regulatory risks, reflecting its consumer facing nature and role as a public good. A focus on affordability is driving increasing regulatory scrutiny of complex and costly structures, such as managed care within the US. Meanwhile, as AI becomes more integrated into clinical tools and workflows, the need for strong human oversight and robust model governance frameworks grows, given the potential for significant patient harm. Regulatory scrutiny also remains a structural feature of the industry and we are closely tracking developments in areas such as drug pricing reform and tariff policy. Environmental risks are also rising: the EU's 2024 revision of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive introduces a mandatory Extended Producer Responsibility regime, requiring pharmaceutical companies to fund at least 80% of advanced wastewater treatment costs and all associated administrative and data collection expenses. We will monitor how EU member states translate these obligations into product level fees and continue to engage with companies to ensure they are actively reducing externalities and managing emerging environmental liabilities.

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## Lens sustainability **opportunities** and **risks**

Access to finance

Digital infrastructure

Enhancing productivity



Meeting basic needs



Resource efficiency



Healthcare access and innovation



Wellbeing and nutrition

Addressing climate change and pollution

Health & safety vulnerability

Labour constraints

**Pollution & waste externalities**



Supply chain dependency

**Product liabilities (including cybersecurity)**





Bribery & corruption

Natural resources & biodiversity

Climate - transition & physical

**Anti-trust and government regulation**



	 <b>Opportunities</b>	 <b>Risks</b>
Health Care Equipment		
Health Care Supplies		
Health Care Services		
Health Care Facilities		
Health Care Technology		
Biotechnology		
Pharmaceuticals		
Life Science Tools & Services		
Health Care Distributors		
Managed Health Care		

High		High	
Low		Low	
Neutral		Neutral	

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# Themes in focus: Healthcare

Key themes driving the sector over the next one to two years

## 01 Artificial intelligence (AI) has many applications which can improve patient outcomes while reducing healthcare system costs

- Ageing populations, persistent cost inflation and practitioner shortages are combining to place healthcare systems under rising strain across developed markets. Healthcare spending already represents around 10% of GDP across the OECD and 17% in the US, and continued growth looks increasingly unsustainable given fiscal constraints and adverse demographics.<sup>7</sup>
- Hospitals account for around one third of total healthcare costs, making them a natural focal point for efficiency gains.<sup>8</sup> AI adoption is beginning to ease this burden by streamlining administrative tasks like scheduling, as well as improving operational functions like supply chain management.
- Beyond cost reduction, AI can enhance care delivery by reducing the cognitive load on clinicians. With an estimated shortfall of 11mn healthcare workers by 2030, tools that reduce clinical workloads are critical.<sup>9</sup> For example, an AI-powered 'Nurse Handover' app designed by HCA and Google summarises electronic health records, enabling nurses to devote more time to patient care and reducing burnout.
- AI's impact is also evident in medical technology and pharmaceuticals. Robotic-assisted surgery is helping hospitals treat more patients with improved consistency and fewer complications. Meanwhile, AI is transforming drug discovery and clinical trial design. As end to end drug development costs have risen from roughly US\$1.3bn to US\$2.2bn over the past decade, even modest improvements in preclinical efficiency or trial success rates could materially shift industry economics.<sup>10</sup>



7 OECD, 2025: Healthcare Statistics 2025

8 Hospitals represented 31% of total US healthcare expenditure in 2023. Source: KFF, 2025: Key Facts About Hospitals

9 World Health Organization, 2026

10 Deloitte, March 2025: Be brave, be bold - Measuring the return from pharmaceutical innovation

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## 02 Regulatory risks remain in the headlines due to public concern, though political realities mean they should prove less negative than they might initially appear

- The Trump Administration's One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) is one source of regulatory headwinds. The Act reduces the number of Americans eligible for Medicaid by 10%, affecting 7.8mn enrollees.<sup>11</sup> It also reduces the ability of states to raise taxes on healthcare providers to help fund Medicaid provision.
- The Act could place pressure on hospitals and nursing facilities, especially in rural areas, with knock-on effects on medical equipment providers. Given the unpopularity of outcomes, the market expects impacts that are muted or delayed with potential modification by a future administration.
- Regulatory pressure from the Administration is increasingly centred on managed care and insurers, which remain under public scrutiny as a cog within an inefficient healthcare system. The recent proposal for a flat 'Medicare Advantage' rate for 2027 surprised the industry, which had anticipated a mid-single digit increase.
- However, the Administration has limited policy levers to reshape the commercial part of the business. Its domestic structure, for example, cannot be influenced through tariffs so we expect actual policy impact to be more modest than current rhetoric suggests.

## 03 Rising geopolitical tensions are directing governments to look at Pharmaceuticals and Life sciences sectors through a national security lens

- The COVID-19 pandemic prompted many governments to view the pharmaceutical industry as a strategically important industry, where access and security of supply were essential to national resilience.
- This trend to ensure security of local supply has only accelerated since April 2025 as the Trump Administration's tariff regime has encouraged the pharmaceutical sector to onshore drugs manufacturing in the US.
- The acceleration of the 'localisation' of drug development and manufacturing is leading to duplicative manufacturing chains in US, EU, India and China. While inefficient for pharmaceutical groups, the trend is driving up capital expenditure, providing a tailwind for companies within life sciences supply chains.
- These efforts will help to reduce supply chain dependency risks that will inevitably be exacerbated by geopolitics, pandemics and the rising risk of extreme weather events. They will not, however, reduce the concentration of key inputs such as active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), manufacturing of which is centred in India and China and would be uneconomical to onshore.

<sup>11</sup> KFF, June 2025: How Will the One Big Beautiful Bill Act Affect the ACA, Medicaid, and the Uninsured Rate?

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Growing  
opportunities

## Sub-industry in focus: Healthcare equipment

**This sub-sector includes companies developing, manufacturing and providing medical devices, diagnostic equipment, imaging systems, surgical instruments and other health-related technologies. It supports access to healthcare and the development of digital infrastructure.**

### How are opportunities changing?

Advances in medical equipment increasingly enable customers, such as hospitals, to improve the efficiency and quality of care delivery. For equipment manufacturers, integrating AI into product suites is becoming a key differentiator – supporting pricing power and expanding total addressable markets. Hospitals are increasingly adopting AI enabled technologies that streamline clinical workflows, enhance precision and ultimately lower the cost of treatment.

Robotics is a clear area of acceleration. Care providers now recognise that robotic systems deliver a compelling cost-benefit proposition, driving widespread adoption even in cash constrained settings. The NHS's investment in robotic platforms underscores the technology's ability to generate efficiency gains despite tight budgets. Penetration rates globally are no higher than 15%, with higher rates of adoption in the US.<sup>12</sup>

Intuitive Surgical remains the global leader in robotic systems for minimally invasive surgery (MIS), an alternative to open surgery that involves smaller incisions to reduce pain and the risk of complications.<sup>13</sup> Its robotically-assisted procedures reduce conversion rates to open surgery and shorten hospital stays relative to manual keyhole surgery, enhancing clinical outcomes and system level efficiencies.<sup>14</sup> In the Chinese market, we recognise the growing competitiveness of local

players, such as MicroPort Medbot and Edge. However, we expect Intuitive's comprehensive product suite, underpinned by three decades of R&D, to support its continued dominance and growth trajectory.

Beyond robotics, AI is also revolutionising diagnostics. Diagnostic imaging systems, provided by companies such as German-listed Siemens Healthineers, use AI to enable more accessible interpretation of CT and MRI scans. This is particularly valuable given the global shortage of radiologists and is becoming a strong driver of equipment replacement cycles, clinical productivity and broader access to care.

### How are risks changing?

Medical equipment companies that integrate AI into their products will also have to navigate heightened legal and reputational risks. As AI algorithms take on greater responsibility in supporting clinical decisions, any failure to ensure patient safety or prevent biased outputs can create significant liabilities. Recent US litigation alleges that an AI-augmented medical device used to treat chronic sinusitis misinformed surgeons about the location of instruments during operations, leading to injuries.<sup>15</sup> For investors, these cases underscore the difference in long term performance between companies with mature governance of AI-related risks and model validation frameworks and those moving faster than their risk controls can support.

<sup>12</sup> Intuitive Surgical, 2026

<sup>13</sup> Intuitive Surgical is the world's largest company focused on soft tissue robotics by revenues, as at February 2026

<sup>14</sup> Cleveland Clinic, 2024: Robotic Surgery

<sup>15</sup> Dowdell, J. et al., 9 February 2026: As AI enters the operating room, reports arise of botched surgeries and misidentified body parts. *Reuters*

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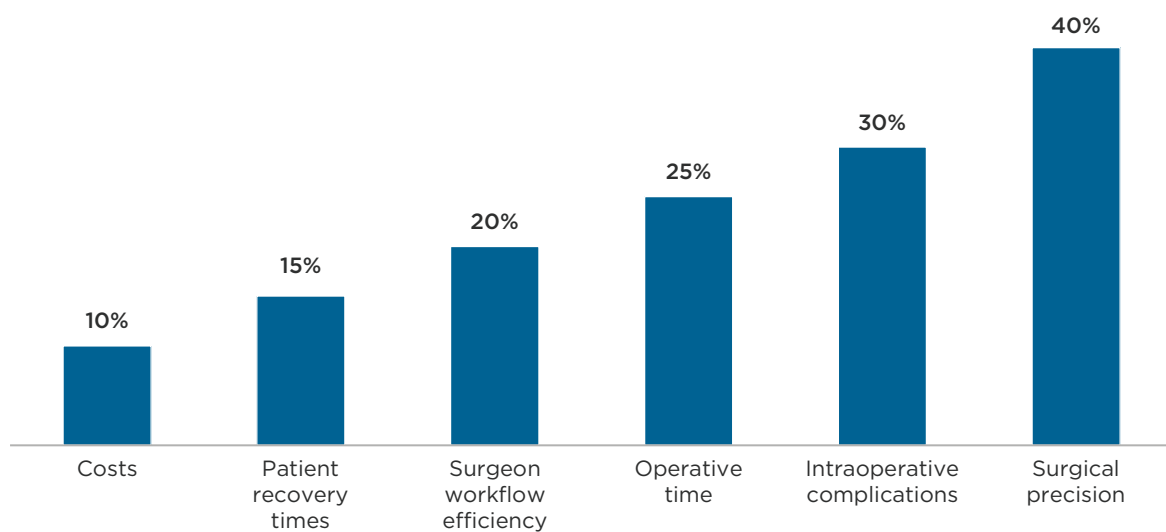


### Key uncertainties and milestones to watch

The pace of AI adoption in regulated healthcare settings remains a key uncertainty, and we are monitoring the speed at which AI moves from pilots to scaled clinical integration. Key milestones to monitor include regulatory approvals of AI-enabled tools, increasing evidence of returns on investment from early adopters, and broader deployment by hospital systems (often signalled through the experience of more advanced hospital groups such as HCA). Partnerships between major AI labs and healthcare providers may accelerate integration, with the presence of AI labs in the sector a new development we are monitoring. OpenAI has just started to offer ‘OpenAI for Healthcare’ and Anthropic has unveiled ‘Claude for Healthcare’. An AI-powered medical search engine, OpenEvidence, claims that its platform is used daily by more than 40% of US doctors.<sup>16</sup>

### The positive impacts of AI-assisted robotic surgeries

Improvements in surgical outcomes versus traditional methods (%)



Based on meta-analysis of studies

Source: Wah, J.N.K, June 2025: The rise of robotics and AI-assisted surgery in modern healthcare. *Journal of Robotic Surgery*

<sup>16</sup> Reuters, 21 January 2026: Medical AI startup OpenEvidence doubles valuation to \$12 billion in latest round

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Growing  
opportunities

## Sub-industry in focus: Life sciences

**This sub-sector includes companies primarily addressing the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries with products and services enabling drug discovery, development and production, by providing analytical tools and instruments, consumables and supplies, clinical trial services and contract research services. It contributes to sustainability by improving the efficiency of healthcare systems, in particular the effectiveness of preventative care.**

### How are opportunities changing?

The onshoring of drug manufacturing, which was initially a defensive response to tariff risk and the pandemic, has evolved into a structural tailwind for the life sciences supply chain. Under the Trump Administration, companies have accelerated investment in new and expanded domestic facilities, creating a multi year capital expenditure cycle that enhances resilience while simplifying historically complex global supply chains. This shift is now starting to translate into order strength and will accelerate going forward. Whilst there is a debate about how much of the manufacturing is truly incremental, we believe these companies should see a modest sustained tailwind from 2027 to 2030.

From 2027 onwards, we expect this capex cycle to act as a positive catalyst for both earnings and valuation multiples. Beneficiaries span bioprocessing specialists – including Danaher, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Sartorius and Repligen –

as well as quality assurance leaders such as Waters, Agilent and Mettler Toledo. For these companies, increased demand for single use systems, analytical tools and process control technologies should support above trend revenue growth.

Opportunities also arise from the application of AI to the notoriously inefficient drug discovery process. Accelerating preclinical development, even marginally, could transform the industry's economics given the decade long timeline from molecule discovery to commercialisation and the finite period of patent protection. While no fully AI-designed drug has secured approval, multiple AI drug development companies have succeeded in advancing AI-identified drugs into clinical trials. Generative AI drug creation company Absci says it can cut the pre-clinical stage from six years to as little as 18 to 24 months.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>17</sup> Absci, 2023: Absci First to Create and Validate De Novo Antibodies with Zero-Shot Generative AI

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## How are risks changing?

Short term political risk for the pharmaceutical sector has eased, reducing headwinds for life sciences companies. Recent agreements with the US Administration have reduced the likelihood of disruptive near term policy intervention on drug pricing, helping stabilise the regulatory backdrop in the world's largest healthcare market.

At the same time, the localisation and duplication of drug production is emerging as a meaningful risk mitigation trend. By moving manufacturing closer to end markets, companies are diversifying risk exposure to supply chain disruptions driven by natural disasters, geopolitical tensions or future pandemics.

### Key uncertainties and milestones to watch

**The degree of AI's effectiveness in drug discovery and speed of adoption in a highly regulated market.** It remains unclear whether there will be a higher clinical success rate for 'AI-discovered' molecules. The highly regulated nature of the sector could also slow the adoption of AI techniques into R&D despite its effectiveness.



# US\$500bn

Planned investment in new US-based pharmaceutical manufacturing

Source: PhRMA, 2025

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**Worsening  
risks**

## Sub-industry in focus: **Managed health care**

**This sub-sector includes owners and operators of health maintenance organisations (HMOs), insurers and other managed health plans. They support access to healthcare, wellbeing and meeting basic needs.**

### **How are opportunities changing?**

Rising healthcare costs discussed in the key themes facing the sector also presents opportunities for managed care organisations (MCOs). The rising need for cost containment increases the strategic relevance of MCOs, whose core function is to control medical spend through data driven pricing, contracting and care coordination.

These players can also increasingly seize opportunities from deploying AI in their data-driven business models to help reduce administrative costs and optimise their medical loss ratio (MLR, the percentage of premiums spent on claims). The MLR is the biggest determinant of their profitability. AI can help insurers improve this ratio by enhancing their ability to price, predict and manage risks. Machine learning models can, for instance, flag high risk members earlier, enabling proactive care management.

Insurers also have large administrative infrastructures due to claims processing, with AI likely playing a role in automating claims adjudication and improving the efficiency of prior authorisation. As operating margins in managed care are mid-single digits, even most SG&A (selling, general and administrative) cost reductions can improve operating leverage substantially.

### **How are risks changing?**

Existential threats from policy risk remain low, but political scrutiny of the managed healthcare sub-sector is increasing. Following the conclusion of drug pricing negotiations and pharmaceutical agreements, policy attention is shifting towards managed care profitability and Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM) practices. The proposed 2027 Medicare Advantage rates exemplify the mounting pressure on the industry, with the unexpected flat rates potentially triggering negative earnings revisions if there is not a material improvement in the final rate notice.

Structural reform of the US private insurance system remains unlikely, however. Firstly, there are limited policy levers for the Trump Administration to pull: tariffs are not relevant to domestic service suppliers. Secondly, reforms would be incredibly disruptive to care and thus lack sufficient political consensus to be passed within Congress.

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### Key uncertainties and milestones to watch

**Public perception and mounting political pressure.** Healthcare in the US remains very costly by international standards and coverage is very expensive for those without provision provided by employers. The sector also suffers from poor public perception, as evidenced by some reactions to the murder of the CEO of UnitedHealthcare in 2024. Like past electoral cycles, there is likely to be continued political pressure to address managed care costs, and we expect the issue to be front of mind ahead of mid-term elections later in 2026. However, the complexity of implementing a material reform to the healthcare system and the lack of a silver bullet are impediments to meaningful disruption.



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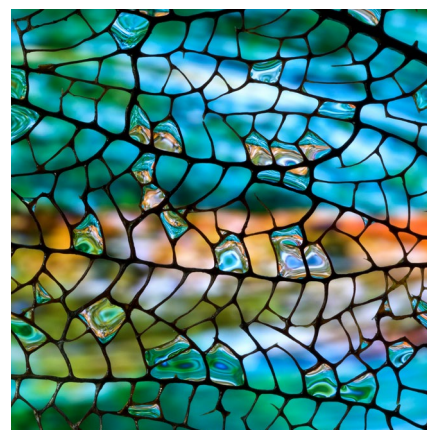
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## A lens on the transition: trends shaping the future economy

Sector in focus: Healthcare



### **Sustainability Lens methodology**

The Impax Sustainability Lens is a proprietary rules-based framework which seeks to identify investment opportunities and risks associated with the transition to a more sustainable economy, based on Impax's fundamental insights. More information is available upon request.

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