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GCC Tender Readiness

Winning Public Procurement for Medicines in the Gulf

HERMS Consultancy DMCC

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Winning Public Procurement for Medicines in the Gulf

In the Gulf, registration makes a medicine legal to sell. A tender award makes it available to most public patients. This paper sets out what GCC buyers require, where companies lose bids, and how to be ready before the tender opens.

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Executive Summary

Public buyers decide most medicine volume in the Gulf. In Saudi Arabia, public healthcare institutions must source medicines and medical devices through central tenders run by NUPCO.22 The Gulf Health Council's joint procurement programme ran tenders worth more than SAR 2.4 billion in 2025.11 The UAE has created a Supreme National Committee for Unified Procurement to buy medicines for all government programmes at federal and local level.15

SAR 2.4bn in Gulf joint procurement tenders, 202511	**1%** NUPCO bid bond, valid at least 90 days2	**10%** Saudi price preference for national products6	**2 Jan 2027** new Saudi procurement law takes effect9

Tender rules are strict and largely pass-or-fail. NUPCO rejects late submissions, requires products to be registered with the SFDA, and may disqualify a bid if the original bid bond is not delivered within three days of opening.1,2 Saudi local content rules can exclude an offer for a listed product that has no baseline certificate.3

Six priorities for tender readiness

Register early: product registration and supplier registration come before any bid.1,19

Map every buyer: NUPCO, the Gulf Health Council, UAE unified procurement, Hamad Medical Corporation and national ministries each have their own rules.10,15,20

Build the document pack once: licences, GMP certificates, agency letters and certificates of analysis, kept current.3

Price with the evaluation formula in mind: local content preference changes the evaluated price, not the price paid.6

Plan the tender calendar: published annual plans let companies prepare months ahead.5,10

Prepare for after the award: performance bonds, supply terms and objections all have deadlines.1

HERMS view

Most tenders are not lost on price. They are lost on a missing certificate, an expired document or a late bond. Readiness is a system, not a sprint before the deadline.

1. Why Tender Readiness Decides Access

A marketing authorisation allows a product to be sold. For public patients, the product must also be listed, tendered and awarded. Until that happens, patients in public hospitals may not receive it, even when it is registered.

What a lost or missed tender costs

Lost volume: NUPCO tenders cover government health sectors across the Kingdom through a unified catalogue and annual plan.4,5

Lost time: a Gulf joint procurement cycle takes around four months from catalogue update to provisional award.12 Missing one cycle can delay access by a year or more.

Lost reference price: NUPCO and Gulf Health Council awards set the prices that later negotiations start from.

Lost position: a competitor that wins the award becomes the default supplier for the contract period.

Who this paper is for

Pharmaceutical manufacturers, marketing authorisation holders, local agents and distributors that supply, or plan to supply, public healthcare buyers in the six GCC states.

2. The GCC Procurement Landscape

There is no single Gulf buyer. Companies must plan for regional, national and emirate-level channels.

Buyer	Scope	Key point for suppliers
NUPCO, Saudi Arabia1	Unified procurement for government health sectors	Supplier registration and qualification; SFDA-registered products; electronic submission

Buyer	Scope	Key point for suppliers
Gulf Health Council joint procurement10	Medicines, vaccines, supplies and devices for GCC member states	Centrally registered products and accredited manufacturing sites23
UAE Supreme National Committee for Unified Procurement15	Medicines, supplies, equipment and vaccines for government programmes	Federal and local scope; implementing rules still developing
DoH Abu Dhabi unified procurement programme16,17	Thiqa, basic insurance and funded mandates	DoH awards suppliers; RAFED distributes
Emirates Health Services19	Federal hospitals in the UAE	Supplier registry; bids in AED; annual renewal
Hamad Medical Corporation, Qatar20	HMC and Ministry of Public Health drug tenders	Ministry of Finance classification; tenders on Monaqasat
Ministry of Health, Kuwait21	Public hospitals and centres	Tenders published through Kuwait Government Online

Oman and Bahrain

Both states take part in Gulf joint procurement and also buy nationally. Confirm the current national tender portal and rules with each ministry before bidding.

3. Eligibility Gates

Most GCC tenders apply pass-or-fail eligibility checks before technical or financial evaluation. A company that fails a gate is not scored.

Gate	What buyers ask for	Typical lead time risk
Product registration	SFDA registration for NUPCO; GCC central registration for Gulf joint procurement1,23	Longest; must start a year or more ahead
Supplier registration	NUPCO registration and qualification; EHS supplier registry; HMC vendor registration1,19,20	EHS activates within five working days if complete19
Government classification	Qatar Ministry of Finance classification under Bylaw 24 of 201520	Required before receiving HMC invitations
Local presence	Local agent or commercial registration, depending on the buyer14,20	Agency agreements must be signed and attested
Licences	Import and supply licences, including for controlled drugs20	Must be valid at bid and at delivery
Quality evidence	Valid GMP certificate from SFDA or the reference authority3	Inspections and renewals take months

NUPCO's 2026 medical supplies conditions show a limited exception: where a product is not registered with the SFDA, offers with FDA, EMA or CE certification may be considered.24 Companies should not assume this applies to medicines tenders.

4. Saudi Arabia: NUPCO and Local Content

How a NUPCO tender works

NUPCO publishes an annual tender plan with expected opening and award dates.1,5

Registered, qualified suppliers buy the tender booklet and submit electronically.1,2

Technical and financial proposals are uploaded as PDF through the supplier relationship management system, with a separate signed quotation for each item.25

The bid bond is 1% of the total bid value and must be valid for at least 90 days; the original must arrive within three working days of opening.2

A technical committee of NUPCO and public health representatives evaluates products against specifications, terms, samples and reference experience.1,2

Initial results usually follow in four to eight weeks; objections are reviewed in four to eight weeks before final results.1

Awarded companies submit a performance bond, after which the bid bond is released.1

Local content rules

Price preference: for national products not on the mandatory list, the foreign price is treated as 10% higher during evaluation.6

Mandatory list: listed national products must be bought locally; LCGPA has stated that about 623 pharmaceutical and medical device items from around 90 manufacturers are on the list.7,8

Baseline certificate: bidders for listed medicines must provide a local content baseline certificate, or NUPCO may exclude the offer.3

Bond alternatives: NUPCO accepts a valid SME (Monshaat) certificate or local manufacturer certificate in place of the initial bid bond.2

The new procurement law

A new Government Tenders and Procurement Law takes effect on 2 January 2027 and replaces the 2019 law.9 It raises the direct purchase threshold from SAR 100,000 to SAR 1 million, merges bid opening and evaluation into one committee, and lets LCGPA take part in evaluation discussions.9 Implementing regulations, including payment terms, are still being finalised.9

5. Gulf Health Council Joint Procurement

The Gulf joint procurement programme has served member states since 1976.11 It prepares the list of companies qualified to bid, receives samples, opens envelopes and awards contracts through Gulf committees.10,11 More than 600 manufacturers worldwide take part.13

SAR 2.4bn tenders conducted in 202511	**~4 months** from catalogue update to provisional award12	**600+** participating manufacturers13	**1976** programme established11

What suppliers need

Central registration: centrally approved products from accredited manufacturing sites are eligible for Gulf joint procurement tenders.23

Local partner: prequalified suppliers have been required to have an agent or local partner in Saudi Arabia.14

Price discipline: accepted tenders set the price, but countries contract directly for volume.14

Calendar awareness: the Council publishes a tender schedule and plans needs up to two years ahead.10,11

Planning point

Because central registration and joint procurement are linked, a delay in central registration can mean missing a full joint procurement cycle.

6. United Arab Emirates: Unified Procurement

Cabinet Resolution No. 87 of 2023 created the Supreme National Committee for Unified Procurement. It handles procurement of medicines, supplies, medical equipment and vaccines for all government programmes at federal and local level, and oversees tender outcomes and negotiations with suppliers.15

Abu Dhabi

Scope: the programme covers Thiqa, the basic health insurance policy and government-funded mandates.16,17

Provider restriction: providers must not negotiate new purchases of covered products with any party; purchasing goes through committee contracts at committee prices.16

Distribution: DoH appointed RAFED Healthcare Supplies as the designated distributor, raising purchase orders to awarded suppliers based on lead time.17

Exclusions: inpatient and long-term care drugs are excluded from the programme; enhanced insurance policies are not covered.18

Federal buyers

Emirates Health Services requires supplier registration, electronic bids, bids in UAE dirhams under the registered company name, and annual renewal.19 Federal procurement also follows Federal Law No. 11 of 2023, in force since 1 December 2023.26

Implication

In Abu Dhabi, the award decision has moved from individual providers to the unified programme. Companies need a programme-level tender and pricing strategy, not only hospital relationships.

7. Qatar and Kuwait

Qatar

Classification: all suppliers must be classified by the Ministry of Finance under Bylaw 24 of 2015 to receive HMC invitations and awards.20

Publication: HMC announces tenders on the Ministry of Finance Monaqasat portal.20

Overseas suppliers: must register with the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, as named in HMC terms, or appoint a local agent; documents need attestation.20

Licences: pharmaceutical vendors must hold valid licences to import and supply medicines and, where relevant, controlled drugs.20

Kuwait

The Ministry of Health publishes its tenders through the Kuwait Government Online portal.21 Companies should track both ministry and central tender channels and confirm current registration requirements before bidding.

8. The HERMS Tender Readiness Index

The index below is a HERMS planning model. It scores readiness across six dimensions drawn from the requirements in Sections 3 to 7.

Dimension	Ready when	Evidence
1. Eligibility	Products registered and suppliers registered with each target buyer	Registration certificates; supplier numbers1,19
2. Documents	Every standard document current for at least the tender validity period	Licences, GMP, agency letters, certificates of origin3
3. Price	Price tested against evaluation rules and reference prices	Evaluated price with local content adjustment6
4. Supply	Capacity, shelf life and lead time confirmed for awarded volumes	Supply plan; remaining shelf life at delivery24
5. Local content	Baseline certificate and preference position known	LCGPA certificate; national product share3,6
6. Post-award	Bonds, contracts and objection routes prepared	Performance bond process; objection timeline1

Scoring

Score	Meaning
0	Not started
1	Partly in place; gaps would block a bid
2	In place for the next tender only
3	In place and maintained for all target buyers

9. The Tender Document Pack

Many documents are requested in every tender. Keeping them in one controlled pack reduces errors and late submissions.

Document	Notes
Product registration certificate	For each item offered3
GMP certificate	From SFDA or the reference authority, valid at submission3
Agency or authorisation letter	From the manufacturer for the offered products3
Commercial registration and licences	Including import and controlled drug licences where relevant20
Social insurance and tax certificates	As required by the buyer3,19
Local content baseline certificate	For Saudi mandatory list medicines3
Bid bond	1% of bid value for NUPCO, valid 90 days2
Certificates of origin and analysis	Attested as required; per batch for NUPCO supplies3
Catalogue or product data	With catalogue numbers matched to the offer24
Signed quotations	On company letterhead, one per item25

Language
NUPCO requires offers in Arabic, with another language allowed alongside it.3 Build Arabic versions into the pack from the start.

10. Readiness Roadmap

The roadmap is a HERMS planning model for a company entering or expanding in GCC public tenders.

Phase	Timing	Actions
Map	Days 0–30	List target buyers and tenders; download annual plans; confirm product registration status per buyer
Register	Days 30–120	Complete supplier registration and classification; sign and attest agency agreements; start missing registrations
Build	Days 60–150	Assemble the document pack; set expiry tracking; prepare Arabic versions; obtain local content certificates
Price	Days 90–180	Model evaluated prices; agree price floors and approval rules; prepare bond facilities
Bid and learn	Day 180 onwards	Submit; record results and objections; review every loss and update the pack

Measures of success

Share of target tenders submitted on time and complete.

Number of bids excluded for document or eligibility reasons.

Award rate by buyer and product.

Days from award to first delivery.

11. Pitfalls and Readiness Checklist

Ten pitfalls

Bidding before the product is registered with the right authority.1,23

Letting a GMP certificate or licence expire during tender validity.3

Sending the original bid bond late.2

Missing the local content baseline certificate for listed medicines.3

Pricing without modelling the 10% preference.6

Submitting under a name that differs from the supplier registry.19

Quoting in the wrong currency.19

Missing Ministry of Finance classification in Qatar.20

Waiting for final results to object.1

Treating each tender as a new project instead of maintaining one pack.

Readiness checklist

Area	Ready when
Buyers	Target buyers, portals and annual plans listed
Registration	Products and supplier accounts active for every target buyer
Documents	Pack complete, current and available in Arabic
Local content	Saudi position known; certificates in place
Finance	Bond facilities and price approvals ready
Supply	Volumes, shelf life and lead times confirmed
Post-award	Objection and performance bond steps assigned to named owners

12. How HERMS Helps

HERMS Consultancy DMCC helps pharmaceutical companies prepare for and compete in GCC public procurement.

Tender mapping: buyers, portals, calendars and eligibility rules for each target market.

Registration alignment: linking product registration plans to tender dates.

Document readiness: building and maintaining the tender pack, with expiry tracking.

Pricing and local content: evaluated price modelling and preference analysis.

Bid review: pre-submission compliance checks and post-tender lessons learned.

Request a tender readiness review

HERMS will score your readiness using the index in this paper and deliver a prioritised plan for your next tender cycle.

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Disclaimer: This white paper is for information only and does not constitute legal, procurement or regulatory advice. It reflects public sources available on 5 November 2026. Tender terms vary by tender and change over time; always follow the current tender documents. The readiness index and roadmap are HERMS planning models, not buyer requirements. © 2026 HERMS Consultancy DMCC.

Subject index

Select a topic to go to its section in this white paper.

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Gulf joint procurement

NUPCO and local content

Tender documentation

Tender eligibility

Tender readiness index

UAE unified procurement

Related HERMS resources

GCC pharmaceutical pricing and market access strategy

HERMS life sciences solutions

UAE pharmaceutical product registration

GCC central registration through the Gulf Health Council

Contact HERMS

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