

Choosing the right medicine cabinet is a surprisingly nuanced decision in bathroom remodeling. Beyond just storage, your choice—with or without integrated lighting—affects function, style, and even your lighting layout. Today, we'll break down the costs and considerations for lighted medicine cabinets versus traditional ones while weaving in industry standards, key players like the National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA), and trusted suppliers such as Golden Lighting and Lumens. Plus, we'll clarify the vital roles of the glazier and electrician in your illuminated cabinet project.

Medicine Cabinet Types: Functional Decisions Beyond Storage

At a glance, medicine cabinets seem straightforward: a mirror with a behind-the-wall or recessed storage cavity. But every element—shape, storage configuration, mounting style, and lighting inclusion—has a direct impact on usability, aesthetics, and cost.

Shape and Mounting

- **Rectangular vs Rounded:** NKBA guidelines suggest sticking with shapes that maximize mirror usable area and complement bathroom proportions. Rounded mirrors may seem trendy, but they often reduce storage depth and complicate lighting layout.
- **Wall-Hung vs Recessed:** Recessed cabinets sit flush, saving space but often requiring wall modifications. Surface-mounted cabinets are easier and cheaper to install, especially in remodels where walls aren't opened.

Storage Options

- **No storage:** Sometimes, a mirror-only cabinet or mirrored panel is installed, prioritizing visual function.
- **Adjustable shelves:** For typical toiletries, adjustable glass or metal shelves improve usability.
- **Outlet-integrated:** Medicine cabinets with an outlet inside offer convenient power access for electric toothbrushes and razors, usually at extra cost and complexity.

Lighting Variants

Now, this is the crux for many remodels: baked-in lighting changes everything. But lighting styles differ:

- **Front-lit LED mirrors:** Thin LED strips or panels embedded behind the mirror surface, offering soft frontal illumination.
- **Backlit mirrors:** LED halos mounted behind the mirror, creating ambient lighting.
- **Integrated overhead or side sconces:** Lighting added around the cabinet or flanking it, often requiring coordination with electrician for wiring.

Beware that marketing often blurs “backlit” and “front-lit.” As an architect with a dozen years specifying bathroom lighting, I always lock in the lighting decision before sizing the mirror or cabinet. It prevents clashes later.

Sizing Rules: Lighting Layout Drives Mirror and Cabinet Width

Much advice on vanity mirrors ignores the firm rules of sconce spacing or LED panel size. The National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) specifies:

1. Mirrors should be slightly narrower than the vanity countertop—usually 4 to 6 inches less—to accommodate wall sconce clearance.

2. Sconces or integrated lighting fixtures should be placed at about 65 to 70 inches above the finished floor.
3. For functional task lighting, luminaires should be at face level, between 60 and 72 inches high.

Lighting providers like Golden Lighting offer detailed fixture specs to help balance these dimensions. Without respecting these standards, you risk overcrowded cabinets that crowd out sconces or poorly illuminated vanity zones.

Placement Height and Sconce Spacing

Ensure your lighted medicine cabinet installation honors recommended mounting heights. For example:

- Medicine cabinet mid-point: ~65-68 inches AFF (above finished floor).
- Wall sconces flanking the mirror should be placed 28-36 inches apart (center to center) to avoid visual clutter while providing balanced lighting.

Work closely with your electrician during planning—especially for hardwired LED installations. Adding new feeds or switches requires coordination with your home's electrical panel and often needs permits.

Price Comparison: Lighted vs Regular Medicine Cabinets

You probably want hard numbers, so let's dive into the typical cost ranges including product and installation:

Product Type	Product Cost Range	Installation Cost Range	Total Estimated Cost	Notes
Regular medicine cabinet (non-lighted)	\$100 – \$400	\$120 – \$300	\$220 – \$700	Varies with recessed vs surface mounted, simple mirrored doors.
Lighted medicine cabinet	\$250 – \$700	\$150 – \$350	\$400 – \$1,050	Includes hardwired LED lighting, possibly integrated outlet. Higher costs reflect electrician and glazier involvement.

Note that these price ranges come from aggregating offerings [above mirror light bar width rule](#) by national and specialty retailers like those stocked by Lumens. Your local glazier, crucial for templating and installing flat or curved plate glass components, often charges hourly or per project, typically \$150 to \$300. Their work ensures perfect glass fitting for optimal mirror flatness and lighting diffusion.

The Role of the Glazier and Electrician

An often overlooked point is the importance of pros like the glazier and electrician in transitioning from a plain to a lit medicine cabinet.

- **Glazier:** They template the space, cut tempered plate glass mirrors to exact specifications, and install sealed edges to resist humidity damage. Unsealed edges or cheap mirrored surfaces are frequent points of failure in humid bathroom environments.
- **Electrician:** Beyond simply plugging in a light, a licensed electrician ensures the LED mirror or integrated light fixture is hardwired to code. They handle new feed installations, ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protections, and switch placements. Sometimes an added outlet inside the cabinet is incorporated to power razors or toothbrush chargers, adding complexity.

Failing to account for these trades typically results in hidden costs or performance headaches down the line.



Task Lighting vs Ambient Lighting: Why It Matters in Medicine Cabinet Choice

Lighted medicine cabinets are often advertised as borrowing showroom-style glowing ambiance. But there is a critical distinction between *task lighting* and *ambient lighting* in bathrooms:

- **Task lighting** aims for bright, shadow-free illumination right at mirror height, enabling shaving, makeup application, and grooming. This usually means frontal and side illumination with color temperatures around 3000-3500K and CRI (color rendering index) above 80.
- **Ambient lighting** fills the room's background, setting mood more than function. Backlit mirrors with LED halos or soft edge glow often fall here.

For true bathroom tasks, the integrated lighting in a medicine cabinet has to provide quality, color-corrected light. If you opt for a backlit cabinet without flanking sconces or overhead task lighting, you'll likely need to add supplemental sources.

This is why, when specifying fixtures, I always nail down the *lighting plan first*. From there, mirror or cabinet width is sized to accommodate sconces or built-in LEDs to ensure ample, balanced light.

Summary: When to Spend More on Lighted Cabinets

If your bathroom remodel budget allows the \$400 to \$1,050 investment for lighted medicine cabinets (installed), you gain:

- Seamless, integrated task lighting optimized for grooming.
- Cleaner wiring and safety via electrician hardwiring.
- Durable, expertly templated mirror glass with better humidity resistance thanks to pro glaziers.
- The convenience of in-cabinet outlets for cordless appliance charging.

Otherwise, regular medicine cabinets remain a cost-effective option, with added lighting layered on externally by sconces or vanity lamps.

As a final reminder, make sure your chosen cabinet respects spacing guidelines and lighting heights per **NKBA** recommendations. Avoid oversized mirrors that crowd flanking sconces or poor lighting that turns the cabinet into a shadow box.

Resources and Next Steps

- Consult NKBA guidelines for mirror and lighting placement standards.
- Browse lighting options at Lumens and Golden Lighting to compare fixture specs and color temperatures.
- Discuss your LED mirror plans early with your electrician and glazier to incorporate into your remodel timeline and budget.

Choosing the right medicine cabinet is about harmonizing smart design, lighting, and installation craftsmanship. Start with the lighting plan, size mirrors smartly, and work closely with your trades. The right lighted medicine cabinet enhances daily bathroom use while making your remodel shine.

