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The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
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25 February 2021

Dear Chancellor,

I write on behalf of the 11,300 community pharmacies in England, who have been a critical part of the NHS primary care response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past 12 months, pharmacies have kept their doors open providing healthcare to more than 190,000 people every day. As we now look towards recovery from coronavirus they can play an increasingly important role in COVID-19 vaccinations and booster jabs – all supporting the recovery of local businesses, communities and wider NHS services.

But pharmacies' efforts over the past year have come at considerable financial cost, with businesses of all sizes acting in good faith that their COVID-related costs would be covered. Our analysis indicates that these costs are now at more than £400m and rising. This money has been spent on carrying-out services for the NHS in a COVID-secure environment: dispensing over 1 billion prescriptions and providing millions of patient consultations. One in five people seeking advice from their high street pharmacist did so because they could not access other healthcare services or were referred on from them, and almost half would have otherwise had to access hard-pressed GP services. Almost a quarter needed advice regarding COVID-19.

Last year, you said the NHS would get whatever resources it needs to deal with the pandemic. However, we understand from Treasury officials that this is not the case for NHS pharmacies. Pharmacies are now in the position of being forced to repay to the Treasury some of the £370m of COVID-related funds announced with fanfare by ministers last year. This will place many pharmacies at risk of closure, at a time when the NHS is increasingly reliant on them to deliver COVID-19 vaccination services both now and in the booster campaign expected this winter. These closures will also worsen the health inequalities that COVID-19 has exposed.

Community pharmacies are the most accessible providers of NHS services in the country, and like the rest of the NHS they expect the Government to honour its commitment to give the NHS whatever it needs. We hope you will give this matter your urgent attention.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Dukes
Chief Executive