

## Guidance for hosting a pharmacy visit with your local MP

This briefing provides guidance to help LPCs and contractors to organise successful visits to community pharmacies for local MPs. It will be updated on a regular basis.

### Why should you ask your MP to visit a pharmacy?

Like all sectors, community pharmacy needs the support of as many MPs as possible to help us to influence Government thinking and policy on an ongoing basis. At the moment, we particularly need the support of MPs to help press for an urgent funding intervention to protect pharmacy services. A visit to a local pharmacy in their constituency provides a valuable opportunity for your MP to learn about the current workings of the sector from the 'grassroots', including any local issues you are experiencing. It is a chance to remind them of the value of pharmacy and how much patients and local communities rely on pharmacy, and to show their support for the sector. We also need to show them the severity of the pressures facing pharmacies at the moment.

### Why would an MP visit a pharmacy?

MPs are keen to show support for local businesses and services. They like to show their commitment to their local area and can be passionate about defending local services that may be facing closures. Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs will be particularly amenable to visiting pharmacies which provide much-valued services to the community but are seriously struggling under financial pressure. Conservative MPs may be less critical of Government policies, but should still be concerned about local businesses and it is important that we get across to them the risks if no Government action is taken soon. Often, MPs will use visits as anecdotes for speeches in Parliament to signal their passion for their constituency and argue for Ministers to intervene.

### What are the main messages to emphasise to MPs?

- Millions of patients and their carers, and the wider public, rely on community pharmacies every day.
- But pharmacies are under **unprecedented and critical pressure** with these **vital patient services and support now at risk of serious deterioration**.
- Pharmacy owner feedback indicates that many pharmacies are struggling with cashflow, workload and profitability and **this is already leading to a reduction in some patient services**.
- If no action is taken and pharmacies continue to make a loss dispensing many prescription items, **there is a risk of large numbers of unplanned permanent closures of pharmacies** in the next 12-18 months.
- The network is so fragile that remaining pharmacies may be **unable to cope with additional patient demand for NHS dispensing and pharmaceutical services leading to patient hardship**, should closures occur.

A five-year funding settlement, the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF), was set between PSNC, the Department of Health and Social Care, and NHS England in 2019. It was agreed that the funding for this would remain fixed at £2.592 billion per year, but annual reviews would test the progress of the deal, and pharmacies would be helped to ease capacity constraints.

Since 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed significant additional pressures on pharmacies, and little progress has been made on releasing capacity within the sector. Costs and workload have continued to rise rapidly, with inflationary pressures that could never have been predicted when the funding deal was agreed, and pharmacies have also taken on a range of new services that support their patients.

Pharmacies are now facing immense, unsustainable operational and financial pressures. 92% of all respondents to a PSNC survey this year said that patients are being negatively affected by the pressures on their pharmacy.

The situation is now so severe that the pharmacy funding settlement is no longer fit for purpose and is letting patients down. The sector urgently needs a funding uplift combined with wider support.

**We are calling on the Government to protect vital public health services for patients by making an urgent funding intervention to support pharmacy services. This is critical to remove the risk of large groups of patients potentially facing difficulties accessing their prescription medicines and pharmaceutical advice in the medium-term future.**

Read our [critical pressures briefing](#).

## What pharmacy wants: The Four-Point Plan

PSNC wants to work with the Government to develop a fairly funded plan for community pharmacy, and thereby to ensure that best use is being made of this exceptional local healthcare resource.

At the moment are focussing particularly on the first 2 points below, however you may also like to mention the wider context of how pharmacy could help support the wider health service, if it had the right resources and support.

1. **Resolve the funding squeeze:** Community pharmacy needs **an immediate funding uplift** to prevent collapse, as well as emergency business relief to get through this winter.
2. **Tackle regulatory and other burdens:** Pharmacies must be **protected from medicines market shocks, supported with their workforce crisis, helped to free up capacity and freed from red tape** that does not enhance patient care.
3. **Help pharmacies to expand their role in primary care:** Pharmacies could do **more to support the delivery of primary care**, for example through offering clinical services for long-term conditions like hypertension, diabetes and respiratory disease; supporting people to adopt healthier lifestyles and prevent the development of long-term conditions; medicines optimisation; and a **much wider variety of NHS vaccinations**.
4. **Commission a Pharmacy First service:** A **fully funded pharmacy service** that allows patients to have walk-in consultations for minor conditions would provide accessible care and ease pressure on general practice.

[Read the full Four Point Plan here.](#)

## Organising a visit: A step by step guide

### Identify your MPs

It is important to first identify the right MPs to engage with. Find out which party they belong to, and whether they have served as a Minister or front bench spokesperson. If you are engaging with MPs you do not know, it is a good idea to do some background research. Use resources such as [Hansard](#) or their websites to look for links to community pharmacy or healthcare, as this will give you an idea of their position.

If you already have a relationship with an MP, then you should be able to pick up some of your previous conversations with them, e.g. they may have been interested in a particular local service or might be keen to see pharmacies doing more to support a particular health agenda. Once you have secured a visit, you could follow up with one or more of PSNC's MP briefings, such as the [Four Point Plan](#) or [Pressures Briefing](#) outlined above. If you need any help or guidance on this, please email: [commsteam@psnc.org.uk](mailto:commsteam@psnc.org.uk)

You will most likely deal with an MP's constituency assistant: make a note of their contact details as they could be useful in the future. The following website has a search function which will allow you to easily find your MP: <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons>

## Choose the pharmacy for the visit

Make sure you invite MPs to visit a pharmacy within their constituency. LPCs can check their local MPs against PSNC's list, which maps all MPs in England to their LPC areas. Contractors can additionally use Parliament's [postcode checker](#) to confirm the local MP – this will be helpful if your pharmacy is in a different constituency to where you live.

The pharmacy you choose needs to demonstrate community pharmacy's best assets. Whether it is its accessibility or because of the quality and range of services provided, choose a local pharmacy that shows the best of community pharmacy.

## Make the right approach

Those with an existing relationship with an MP may already have their contact details, but generally MPs are best reached via their [parliamentary email addresses](#). Visits should be billed as an opportunity for MPs to see first-hand the work their local pharmacy teams do, as well as to better understand the challenges they face and the risks of this to patients. Many MPs will be keen to show their constituents that they are supporting local health services, so it would be useful to emphasise the chance to take photos, collaborate on a local press release, and show support for a highly valued team of health professionals in the local community. A template email invitation is included as [Appendix 1](#).

As well as showcasing community pharmacy, a visit will provide an opportunity to discuss pharmacy policy and the challenges facing the sector. Be aware that the visit may be short, due to diary pressures, meaning you will need to be clear about what you want them to understand and how you would like them to support you. Be ready for the question: "How do you want me to help?" You could highlight the [Four Point Plan](#) and particularly the need for an urgent funding uplift in response to this question. MPs can table questions in Parliament, write privately to Ministers, or make contact with local commissioners and others responsible for planning and delivering local care, and PSNC can help with these follow-up actions.

## Publicise the visit

A pharmacy visit is an ideal opportunity to generate local press coverage and cement awareness of pharmacy's central role within the community. You can:

- Contact your local newspapers in advance of the visit and make them aware of the time and date of the visit – they may want to send a photographer.
- Take photos of the visit for you to use on social media, in a press release, and to share with the MP and their team.
- Social media is important to a lot of MPs, so be sure to share photos of the visit on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and any other available channels. Encourage the MP and their office to share photos as well.
- Prepare a press release in advance to release the day after the visit. The release should be eye catching without being sensational. Use it to fly the flag for the work of community pharmacists. Give an overview of the purpose of the visit, and detail the individuals present. A template press release is included as [Appendix 2](#).
- Make sure you include a quote from the pharmacy owner, the MP and any other relevant attendees (e.g. commissioner representative). You can approach all these people in advance of the visit about adding a quote to the release, or you can ask the MP for a quote on the day itself – just make sure they have final sign off.
- Remember to keep an eye out for any coverage, including on the MP's own communications channels!

## Follow up

After the event, thank all those involved in the visit, particularly the MP and their point of contact with you. There may be an opportunity to provide them with a further briefing, or to put them in touch with PSNC on specific points that arose during the visit.

### For LPCs: report back to local pharmacy contractors

LPCs should tell other contractors about the visit and any outcomes: it may inspire them to get involved in lobbying MPs in the future. You can also let PSNC know by emailing us at: [george.foote@psnc.org.uk](mailto:george.foote@psnc.org.uk)

### How can MPs help?

MPs will often ask if they can do anything to help. You can suggest the following:

#### **Write to or meet with Ministers**

If MPs show an interest in the challenges facing the sector, ask if they are prepared to write letters or put questions to Ministers/officials calling for additional support. Similarly, ask if they would be willing to request a meeting with the Pharmacy Minister or Secretary of State for Health & Social Care. This may be an informal, short meeting between MPs, or it may be a more formal meeting whereby the local MP facilitates a delegation of pharmacy representatives.

#### **Submit a parliamentary question**

MPs may offer to ask parliamentary questions to show their support for pharmacy. MPs can ask oral parliamentary questions in the House of Commons chamber. These will usually be at departmental questions or Prime Minister's Questions. Written parliamentary questions can also be submitted by MPs to Government departments. These always receive an answer from the Minister and are a useful way to elicit information.

#### **Join the pharmacy group in Parliament**

MPs can also support the work of the All-Party Pharmacy Group (APPG) in Parliament, so please do encourage them to join. The group is actively sponsored and supported by PSNC jointly with the other pharmacy bodies. The group hosts events and coordinates parliamentary activities to promote pharmacy. If an MP would like to join as a member, or simply find out more about upcoming events, they can email: [contact@pharmacyappg.co.uk](mailto:contact@pharmacyappg.co.uk)

## Appendix 1: Template letter to invite MPs to a visit

Dear xxx

As your constituent (from **postcode**), **[and pharmacist/pharmacy team member at [pharmacy name]]** am writing to warn you that the community pharmacy sector is facing unprecedented pressures and is now at breaking point.

I would like to invite you to visit **[pharmacy name]**, to speak to staff working on the frontline and see for yourself the immense pressures I am facing.

I would also urge you to do all you can to ensure that this pharmacy and thousands of others across the country are protected from closure. More than 600 pharmacies have already closed since 2016, any further closures will put unbearable strain on the local healthcare system and make the current issues worse. This could mean that patients don't have the same easy access to vital medicines as was previously available.

I hope that a visit such as this is of interest. I hope to hear from you soon and thank you for your support in advance.

Kind regards,

xxx

## Appendix 2: Template press release: pharmacy visit

MP hears of critical pressures on pharmacy patient services

[Name of MP] has visited [xxx pharmacy] to learn about the critical pressures pharmacy teams in [constituency] are under, and what support they need to continue to offer the high-quality services that patients have come to expect.

[Name of MP] heard about the vital support the pharmacy has been providing for the local community, including the provision of face-to-face healthcare advice and a range of clinical services alongside the regular dispensing of prescription medicines.

[Name of MP] also learnt that pharmacies are now under unprecedented and critical pressure with many vital patient services and support now at risk of serious deterioration.

[Pharmacist] comments: "Community pharmacy teams were the first port of call for many local people on healthcare matters throughout the pandemic. Now as the country prepares for a difficult winter, with high levels of flu and COVID-19 expected, our patients and the wider community will increasingly rely on us for essential prescription medicines, and also for healthcare advice about symptoms or long-term conditions, as well as other services. We simply cannot do this job, without further urgent funding from government."

[Name of MP] commented: "I have learnt today just how important [xxx pharmacy] is to the local community here in [constituency]. It would be simply unthinkable if this or any other local pharmacy was forced to close due to lack of funding. I will continue to push the case with my parliamentary colleagues, that community pharmacy needs fair and sustainable funding to secure its future.

[xxx of the xxx Local Pharmaceutical Committee] said: "As many patients will know, our local community pharmacies across [constituency] are doing far more than just dispensing medicines. They are offering a whole range of services and are keen to offer so much more. We are pleased that [xxx MP] understands that the sector is now under critical pressure and without urgent funding, there is a risk of a large numbers of closures. This would be a tragedy for our local community.