

Writing to MPs: Guidance for Contractors

Background

Recognising the crisis facing the community pharmacy sector, PSNC's ongoing priority is to make strong and urgent representations to Government to seek an emergency funding uplift as well as other support. PSNC Chief Executive Janet Morrison has recently recorded a video update for community pharmacy contractors following PSNC's November Committee meeting [here](#). She and contractors will soon meet with the Minister.

We are undertaking a political influencing campaign seeking to gain wide and vocal support from MPs and Peers from across all parties and to ask for their help in pressing Government to act. We are working closely with LPCs on this, and activities so far have included hosting an event in parliament (which enabled us as well as LPCs to brief MPs and Peers), supporting Parliamentary questions and debates, and engaging with Government advisors. We have also been talking to the other national pharmacy organisations about the current situation and engaging with the media to get across the severity of the situation.

You can read our briefings for MPs here:

[PSNC's Four Point Plan](#)

[Community Pharmacy Patient Services Under Critical Pressure](#)

How can contractors support the political campaign?

To support the briefings and messages that we and LPCs are giving to MPs it is essential MPs hear from pharmacy owners in their constituency about the pressures they are facing and the risk that poses to the care and support they provide to patients. They need to know that this is at risk if current pressures continue unchecked. We therefore strongly encourage all contractors to contact their local MP as soon as possible – the easiest way to do this is by email, and this briefing sets out some ideas to help you with that.

Firstly, you can find out who your MP is and their email address here:

[Find MPs - MPs and Lords - UK Parliament](#)

Contacting your MP: Guidance

Personal letters and emails are much more powerful than a template letter in getting your MP onside, so we have deliberately produced this guidance rather than writing a template letter. You might like to follow the below format for your letter, or to pick and choose some of these sections to include in an email.

If you don't have time to write, you could try contacting MPs on social media or email their office to seek a meeting online or at their local constituency surgery, or to invite them to your pharmacy for a visit. The key thing is that engage personally with as many contractors as possible.

The aim of any contact should be to outline the severity of the funding pressures you are now facing and the impact it will have on patients if it continues. Please also ask your MPs to urgently take up the cause with Ministers. Some other general points to consider in any letter:

- Always remain polite and professional in tone
- Focus as much as possible on patients, and what the pressures mean for them now in the future
- If you are aligned with the MP's political views, it may help to mention this
- Throughout the letter, try to emphasise that after years of funding that has reduced in real terms, the sector is on its knees, and urgent action is now required
- Letters should finish with an ask of MPs: see some suggestions below

1. Introduction

Introduce yourself and your business and include the address/postcode of the pharmacy where you work. If you also live in the constituency, say so. If you have met your MP before, remind them of the encounter and thank them for any previous support they gave you. You may like to give an outline of services offered or some detail on the many ways in which you support patients and the local community.

2. Current pressures and workforce

Give an overview of the current pressures that you are experiencing and any changes you have had to make to how you operate. How are these impacting your patients, your staff and your business? What is the outlook and what are your main worries for the future?

You could mention workforce issues here as well as cost and operational pressures. You may like to give some examples of cost increases such as rises in energy bills, inflationary pressures, increasing instances of dispensing medicines at a loss due to market and pricing issues. MPs appreciate data, so do share any financial specifics that you feel able to – this could be in the letter, or as an attached spreadsheet.

You can also reiterate that pharmacy funding has been cut by 25% in real terms since 2015, and mention that more than 90% of pharmacies' income comes from their NHS contractual funding. You can say that unlike other businesses, you cannot pass higher costs on to customers or patients.

3. Disruption to patient services

Give an overview of how, due to these pressures, patients are being impacted. Talk about which services you have stopped or will likely need to stop soon. You could talk about things like patients having to wait longer for prescriptions and any temporary closures. You may like to state that, as a national indicator of pressures, there were 24,601 unplanned temporary pharmacy closures in England in the 12 months from November 2021 to October 2022, according to figures provided by NHS England. If you can give specific examples or tell particular stories, this may help to bring the impact to life for the MP.

4. Risks

Talk about the risks to your business and patients should Government decide not to help. As in our [critical pressures briefing](#), you could also convey that the pharmacy network is so fragile that permanent closures of large numbers of pharmacies are now a risk, meaning patients could suddenly find themselves being directed to alternative locations for access to medicines and pharmaceutical services – which may or may not be easily accessible to them – causing major disruption at a primary care level with inevitable upstream impacts for hospitals. If you have local examples of how this could affect you patients, you could include these.

5. Conclusion

You could conclude with an emotional plea to urge your MP to act to save your pharmacy and to ensure patients can continue to access the lifesaving medicine they rely on.

You should ask your MP to take action by contacting Neil O'Brien MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Health & Social Care, or Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP, the Secretary of State for Health & Social Care.

Other things that you could ask your MP to do include:

- Meet with you for an urgent discussion
- Visit your pharmacy to learn more
- Request a meeting with Ministers on behalf of local pharmacies
- Ask questions in Parliament and raise the serious issues pharmacies face in parliamentary debates

If you would like any further advice or help with contacting your MP or with follow-up actions, please contact commsteam@psnc.org.uk

Please keep us informed of how your MP responds to you.