

January 2023

PSNC Briefing 001/23: A summary of the 2023/24 NHS priorities and operational planning guidance

The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) was published in January 2019 and set out the implementation and intended outcomes of services to be delivered by 2023/24, via a long-term revenue settlement from the Government.

On 22nd December 2022, NHS England published the [2023/24 priorities and operational planning guidance](#), which reconfirms the ongoing need to recover core services and improve productivity, making progress in delivering the key NHS Long Term Plan ambitions and continuing to transform the NHS for the future.

This PSNC Briefing summarises the elements of this guidance which are of most relevance to Local Pharmaceutical Committee officers and members and the community pharmacy sector.

Key tasks

The guidance commits NHS England to supporting local decision making, empowering local leaders to make the best decisions for their local populations and sets out fewer, more focused national objectives, compared to previous planning guidance documents.

These national objectives align with three key tasks for the NHS in 2023/24:

1. recover core services and productivity;
2. as it recovers, make progress in delivering the key ambitions in the Long Term Plan; and
3. continue transforming the NHS for the future.

Recovering core services and productivity and delivering the key ambitions in the Long Term Plan

For these two key tasks, the guidance lists 12 areas that they plan to focus on, with 31 national objectives.

The 12 areas are:

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| 1. Urgent and emergency care; | 7. Maternity; |
| 2. Community health services; | 8. Use of resources; |
| 3. Primary care; | 9. Workforce; |
| 4. Elective care; | 10. Mental health; |
| 5. Cancer; | 11. People with a learning disability and autistic people; and |
| 6. Diagnostics; | 12. Prevention and health inequalities. |

Community pharmacy is not specifically mentioned in the objectives, but one of the essential actions included in the guidance is *increasing use of community pharmacies*.

Three of the areas listed above are relevant to community pharmacy:

1. Area 3: Primary care

Three out of the four objectives for primary care relate to general practice (the fourth relating to dental activity), but these objectives could impact on community pharmacy; the three objectives are:

- Make it easier for people to contact a GP practice, including by supporting general practice to ensure that everyone who needs an appointment with their GP practice gets one within two weeks and those who contact their practice urgently are assessed the same or next day according to clinical need;

- Continue on the trajectory to deliver 50 million more appointments in general practice by the end of March 2024; and
- Continue to recruit 26,000 Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) roles by the end of March 2024.

The two key actions listed to achieve the above objectives are:

1. Ensure people can more easily contact their GP practice (by phone, NHS App, NHS111 or online); and
2. Transfer lower acuity care away from both general practice and NHS 111 by increasing pharmacy participation in the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS).

However, [PSNC's four point plan](#), which has been used to brief MPs on the current situation in pharmacy, highlights how the role of pharmacies could be expanded in primary care and how the commissioning of a fully funded Pharmacy First service, would allow patients to have walk-in consultations for minor conditions and could provide accessible care and ease pressure on general practice.

NHS England will publish the General Practice Access Recovery Plan in early 2023, which will provide details of the actions needed to achieve the above.

2. Area 5: Cancer

One of the objectives for cancer is to increase the percentage of cancers diagnosed at stages 1 and 2 in line with the 75% early diagnosis ambition by 2028. One of the key actions listed is to commission key services which will underpin progress on early diagnosis.

One of these services will be the [community pharmacy pilot](#), which is due to start this month (January 2023), which will allow community pharmacy teams in certain areas of the country to directly refer patients with possible signs of cancer, such as a cough that lasts for three weeks or more, difficulty swallowing or blood in their urine direct for scans and checks without needing to see a GP if staff think it could be cancer.

The [2022/23 Pharmacy Quality Scheme \(PQS\)](#) also includes a quality criterion on cancer awareness, which includes training for all patient-facing staff that provide advice on medicines or healthcare on early diagnosis of cancer and prevention. This will also be a requirement in the 2023/24 Scheme as well as the completion of a risk review for missing red flag symptoms of cancer.

3. Area 12: Prevention and health inequalities

One of the objectives for prevention and health inequalities is also relevant for community pharmacy, which is to continue to address health inequalities and deliver on the [Core20PLUS5](#) approach. In the 2023/24 PQS, pharmacy professionals will be required to complete training on health inequalities and also develop an action plan to tackle health inequalities.

Digital foundations

The guidance acknowledges that the long-term sustainability of health and social care also depends on having the right digital foundations. NHS England commit in the guidance to continue to work with systems to level up digital infrastructure and drive greater connectivity - this includes development of a 'digital first' option for the public and further development of and integration with the NHS App.

This includes the roll out of new functionality for the NHS App, to help people take greater control over their health and their interactions with the NHS, including better support to get to the right in-person or digital service more quickly, access to their patient records, improved functionality for prescriptions and improved support for hospital appointments and choice ahead of next winter.

Local empowerment and accountability

NHS England acknowledge in the guidance that Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) are best placed to understand population needs and they are expected to agree specific local objectives that complement the national NHS objectives included in the guidance. ICSs should continue to pay due regard to wider NHS ambitions in determining their local objectives – alongside place-based collaboratives.

Delegated budgets

The guidance highlights the move towards Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) taking on population healthcare budgets, with pharmacy, ophthalmology and dentistry (POD) services being fully delegated by April 2023.

NHS England will support ICBs as they take on commissioning responsibility across POD services from April 2023, supporting the integration of services.

Joint Forward Plans

One of the key priorities for 2023/24 will be the development of ICB 5-year Joint Forward Plans (JFPs); NHS England has [published guidance](#) to support ICBs and their partner NHS trusts and foundation trusts (referred to collectively in this guidance as partner trusts) to develop these.

Close engagement with partners will be essential to the development of JFPs, which includes working with community pharmacy as a primary care provider.

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information please contact the [PSNC Services Team](#).