

Briefing 027/23: What pharmacy owners told us in September 2023

As part of Community Pharmacy England's commitment to working more closely with pharmacy owners – listening to them better, as well as engaging more regularly via events and other channels – we sought input from the sector ahead of our [September 2023 Committee Meeting](#).

Between 11th and 29th August, our September pre-Committee opinion poll was conducted to gather views from all pharmacy owners on a series of topical issues. The questions were focused on pharmacy owners' opinions and preferences about the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF) 'asks' for 2024/25.

Thanks to all those who took the time to complete the survey. Here we have summarised what you said.

Opinion Poll Results

Almost 300 participants, representing more than 5,400 pharmacy premises in England, engaged with our survey, giving a snapshot of thoughts from across a range of different pharmacy businesses across the country.

Responding to improvements suggested from our July polling, we have enabled participants to report the number of pharmacies they represent and therefore weight responses. This means that the key findings shown below are based on the number of pharmacies each respondent represents. Additionally, we segmented the poll for CCA multiples and requested ODS codes for independent pharmacy owners to allow for further analysis.

Funding asks

Firstly, we asked pharmacy owners to provide their views on a selected set of funding asks for 2024/25, namely:

- Additional funding for emergency or imposed supply measures e.g. serious shortage protocols (SSPs) and hormonal replacement therapy (HRT) prescriptions;
- Uplift on fee rates for existing services;

- Increased margin allowance above the existing £800m i.e. increasing the proportion of funding delivered through margin; and
- Increased margin allowance above the existing £800m i.e. increasing margin in line with increasing total funding.

There was general support for all four of these asks.

The September poll also enabled respondents to list any other funding asks they would want to put to NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care. Many comments repeated the four funding related asks we had already listed (as above), or were not specific asks but rather concerns about the funding challenges in the sector and pharmacy closures in general.

Administration and regulatory changes

We also asked about the further administrative and regulatory changes that would help reduce the pressures that pharmacy owners are facing:

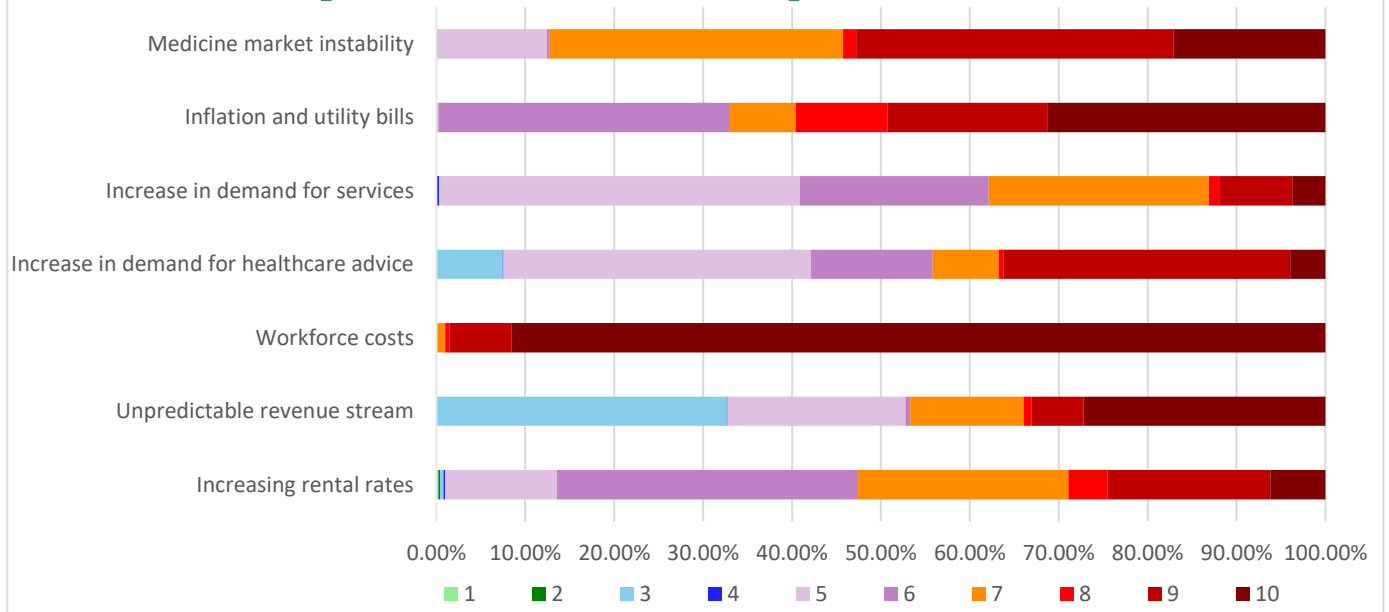
- Around half of the comments related to efficiency changes promised in the five-year CPCF, which are now being taken forward by Government, such as original pack dispensing and changes to supervision.
- Over a third asked for greater discretion for pharmacists to make minor amendments to prescriptions to supply patients with medicines, without the need for an SSP.
- A small number of comments related to simplifying SSPs and quicker introduction when there are known problems.
- Other suggestions included being able to close premises for protected time for staff training, development and other reasons.
- The remaining comments related to removing requirements in the CPCF, often along the lines of Community Pharmacy England's previous requests for regulatory easements.



Financial and operational pressures

For tracking purposes, we also repeated our questions on pharmacy pressures from our July survey. Participants were again asked to rank pressures from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest pressure.

Financial and Operational Pressures - September 2023



The data evidences what we are already fully aware of – that community pharmacies remain under significant pressure, with workforce costs rated as the most pressing issue by all pharmacy types. However, broken down by size of pharmacy business, we can now identify that:

- CCA multiples most clearly call out workforce as their main pressure, with 94% rating it with a score of 10;
- Non-CCA multiples report workforce costs and inflation/utility bills as equally pressing; and
- The independent pharmacies vary more greatly in reporting the extent of pressures.

Using the data

The full polling results were considered by all of our Committee Members looking at what they mean for our current and future priorities, as well as drawing on this valuable information, augmented with feedback from the Regional Representatives and LPCs throughout the meeting.

The polling input is already proving valuable, informing our goals for the CPCF after the current arrangements end in March 2024, as well as our wider strategy development. Having analysed 9,000 words of text data, respondents have provided concrete advice to both the Committee and the



wider Community Pharmacy England policy teams. Our Negotiating Team is also considering further ways we can put this data to good use in future negotiations.

Committee Members appreciated the opportunity to review and reflect on the opinions received directly from pharmacy owners, whilst our policy team found the data beneficial in providing further evidence for use in negotiations and influencing work. The Communications and Public Affairs Team has already been using the July poll results in MP briefings and national press comments, and expect to do the same with September's.

Next Steps

As always, Community Pharmacy England remains fully focused on finding solutions to the complex challenges facing community pharmacy businesses. Our new commitment to regular pre-Committee Meeting engagement work will serve as an important tool for temperature-checking and consultation on key issues with all community pharmacy owners in the future.

We will continue to review and refine how we provide opportunities for pharmacy owners to engage with our Committee Meetings, and planned improvements include:

- Continuously innovate opinion polls to be short, theme based and offer variety;
- Enable pharmacy owners to engage more actively with the poll results through dashboard-like visualisations; and
- Publish a schedule of advance dates for the engagement exercises and share these with the sector and LPCs – asking LPCs to help drive engagement and to provide feedback.

The Committee is also keen to explore how we can monitor which pharmacy owners are responding (and which are not) going forwards to make sure we're reaching as much of the sector as possible. This may require requesting support from LPCs (also known as Community Pharmacy Locals).

If you have any queries or require more information, please contact: comms.team@cpe.org.uk