

2023 Pharmacy Pressures Survey shows depth of pharmacy crisis

Background

Pharmacy owners and teams across England are facing **unprecedented financial and operational challenges**. This has been caused by a number of factors including systemic pharmacy funding cuts, workforce issues and growing staff costs, rising energy bills, inflationary pressures, and increasing instances of dispensing medicines at a loss due to market and pricing issues.

The 2023 Pharmacy Pressures Survey

Community Pharmacy England launched surveys for pharmacy owners and pharmacy team members at the end of January 2023, together known as the 2023 Pharmacy Pressures Survey. This is the second annual survey and it shows that on almost all counts the situation for pharmacies is now worse than ever before. The owners of over **6,200 pharmacy premises, as well as more than 2,000 pharmacy team members** responded to the survey.

Key findings

Patient impact: Almost all pharmacy teams and pharmacy owners reported that patients were being negatively affected by the pressures on their pharmacy. **Around a fifth (18% of owners and 17% of staff) said that patients were being severely impacted.**

97% of pharmacy owners reported being unable to source medicines for patients. 81% said they were unable to spend as much time with patients, and over three-quarters (**76%**) **said they were unable to respond to patients' calls and emails as promptly as usual.** 73% reported longer dispensing times for prescriptions. 65% reported patients waiting longer in the pharmacy for advice.

Increased demand for care: **92% of pharmacy staff have seen a significant increase in requests from patients unable to access General Practice.** Additionally, 61% of pharmacy staff reported a significant increase in delays of prescriptions issued by GPs.



Medicine supply issues: 92% of pharmacies are dealing with medicine supply issues daily.

This is an increase from 67% in the 2022 pressures survey. Even more worryingly, **87% of pharmacy staff report that patient health is put at risk because of medicine supply issues.**

Almost all the pharmacy owners (**97%**) **report significant increases in wholesaler and medicine supply issues** and 71% report delays in prescriptions being issued.

Medicines supply issues have serious implications for pharmacy teams and patients. **Almost all pharmacy staff surveyed report that they are experiencing extra workload** (97%) additional stress due to supply issues (96%), and even more report that patients are frustrated (98%) and inconvenienced by the supply issues (97%).

84% of pharmacies report experiencing aggression from patients due to medicine supply issues; this is an increase from 75% in the 2022 pressures survey.

Rising costs: 96% of pharmacy owners said that they are facing significantly higher costs than last year; up from 80% who felt this way in the 2022 pressures survey. These cost increases came from unreimbursed medicines costs, wage increases, and rising utility bills.

Staff shortages: Over 70% of pharmacy businesses are experiencing shortages of pharmacists and other staff. **77% say there is insufficient funding to cover staff or locum costs;** this is up from 51% in the 2022 pressures survey. Around three quarters cite difficulties in recruiting permanent staff and finding locums. The increasing shortage of pharmacy staff has added more pressure on already overstretched pharmacy teams, with 68% of those surveyed reporting that they have been required to work extra hours due to staff shortages.

Pharmacy staff pressures: 78% of pharmacy team members said that their work is having a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Just 7% said work was having a positive impact on their mental health. When asked to rate how they and their teams were coping with the current pharmacy pressures, 31% of pharmacy staff said they were barely coping.

Concerningly, 45% of pharmacy teams cite patient abuse as one of the reasons why they are not coping at work. Many reported several other significant contributing factors causing pharmacy teams to struggle to cope with the ongoing pressures, including 81% reporting the significant increase in workload, problems sourcing medicines for patients (71%), increases in patients



requests for support (81%) staff unavailability (34%) and having a lack of staff due to insufficient funding (48%).

Concerns about the current crisis and the future

Unsurprisingly, the outlook for most pharmacy businesses is bleak, with pharmacy owners worried about the current operational landscape and the prospects for the future of the sector.

More than three-quarters are extremely concerned about the supply of medicines to their patients (79%) and their business finances (78%). 56% were extremely concerned about the wellbeing of their teams, and 41% are now extremely worried about their ability to help patients.

This survey results reflect the extreme levels of duress and stress that pharmacy teams and businesses are currently experiencing. Urgent funding is needed to help address some of the pressures and to protect patient services and access to medicines.

What needs to happen to alleviate pressures?

- **An immediate injection of funding of at least £400m from the Government.** Without this, the community pharmacy network will collapse and patients will no longer be able to access the support, medicines or advice they need from pharmacies
- A **fully-funded 'Pharmacy First' service in England.** This would allow patients to go straight to their local pharmacist to get support for minor conditions, and freeing up GP capacity, as they currently do in Scotland and Wales.

Further support through regulatory easements is needed to allow pharmacy owners to plan to reduce their opening hours and have further flexibility to operate in the absence of a pharmacist, helping them to maintain services. And changes need to protect pharmacies from the current volatility in the medicines market.

Community pharmacies play a critical role in local communities and this must be protected.

How can MPs help?

We are asking MPs to urgently raise this matter with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Primary Care and Public Health, Neil O'Brien MP, and with the Secretary of State for Health, Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP. This could be through letter-writing, urgent meetings (with delegations, if



needed), or informal discussions. We would also be happy to support any MP wishing to raise the matter in Parliament.

Further information

This survey was carried out in Spring 2023, before PSNC rebranded to Community Pharmacy England and was updated in August 2023.

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