

# Community Pharmacy: A Four-Point Plan

## The headlines

Millions of patients, their carers, and the wider public, rely on community pharmacies every day.

**Pharmacies are pillars of the community, as well as vital and accessible healthcare centres.**

During the pandemic, pharmacies were the only part of the healthcare system that remained open for their patients throughout. **80% of people are within a 20-minute walk of their local pharmacy, and there are more pharmacies in deprived areas.**

**Pharmacies play a huge role in supporting the health of the nation, including reducing health inequalities** which is key to the [NHS Long Term Plan](#). Pharmacies **dispense 1.1bn prescriptions a year** alongside administering millions of NHS vaccinations and supporting public health – all in convenient locations and for the most part without the need for appointments.

Pharmacies are run by skilled businesspeople who combine an entrepreneurial approach with a real desire to improve health outcomes: **they rely on NHS funding for around 90% of their income.** Pharmacy owners' willingness and ability to support Government and NHS priorities has been shown time and again from the thousands of pharmacies setting up COVID vaccination sites, **to the 96% signing up to offer the new Pharmacy First service.**

**But the vital healthcare provided by community pharmacies is under threat.** Community pharmacies have been subjected to a **30% funding cut since 2015** while also having to cope with an ever-increasing workload, relentless medicines supply issues, and workforce challenges. This has pushed too many pharmacies into running at a loss, forcing them to withdraw some services from patients and **causing over 1,300 permanent pharmacy closures across the country since October 2016.** If and this will make it ever harder to ensure that patients can conveniently access the prescription medicines and advice that they need.

**The situation is unsustainable, intolerable, and requires urgent attention.** Government and the NHS must work with us to correct it and to protect **the critical access to pharmacy services and prescription medicines that the public relies on.**

“Everybody rightly wants more from our highly valued community pharmacies, but a combination of an intolerable financial squeeze, extreme operational pressures, and medicines supply and pricing issues has left pharmacies fighting for survival. As the NHS continues to grapple with wider challenges, this is a battle that patients cannot afford for pharmacies to lose. Government and the NHS must not stand by and let pharmacies turn out their lights for good.

Janet Morrison  
Community Pharmacy England Chief Executive

## Community Pharmacy England's four-point plan

1

**A sustainable funding model for community pharmacies:** Pharmacy finances are currently unsustainable, resulting in intolerable pressures and a degradation in services for the public, including temporary closures of pharmacies. To protect patient access to medicines and wider pharmacy services, pharmacy funding needs to be reset at an economically sustainable level, with ongoing increases to reflect cost rises.

2

**A full review of the medicines supply market, and short-term relief measures:** We must protect access to medicines and address issues such as under-funding and price concessions. Alongside the review, we should take forward immediate measures such as allowing pharmacists to make minor adjustments to prescriptions, to help alleviate some of the issues that patients are facing and reduce the burden on GPs and pharmacy.

3

**Investment in community pharmacy's clinical future:** Building on the new Pharmacy First service, community pharmacies have much more to offer to support the nation's health and wellbeing. We would particularly like to see them empowered to offer more vaccinations, and wider support for women's health and people with long-term conditions.

4

**A plan to safeguard the pharmacy workforce:** Like other health and care settings, community pharmacy is in the midst of significant workforce issues. To ensure the public can continue to rely on critical community pharmacy services, Government should work with the NHS on a pharmacy-specific workforce recruitment, retention and return plan.

“As long as waits for healthcare continue and the health and wellbeing of the nation suffers, we need to protect our vital community pharmacies. A thriving community pharmacy network has so much to offer patients and the public, providing safe access to medicines alongside a range of preventative, public health and clinical services, as well as supporting wider primary care and the NHS. We want to work with Government and NHS to action this four-point plan, unlocking the potential of community pharmacies now and for the future.

Janet Morrison  
Community Pharmacy England Chief Executive



## Four Point Plan: Notes

### 1. A Sustainable funding model for community pharmacies

- Since 2016, core NHS funding received by community pharmacies has **declined by 30% in real terms**. This stems from a flat funding model, which results in core funding reducing year-on-year. On average, pharmacies rely on this funding for **90% of their income**.
- Inflationary pressures and workforce shortages have driven up costs further, reducing funding available to deliver frontline services. Unlike other sectors, **pharmacies cannot pass on rising costs onto consumers**, meaning they must absorb all increases.
- Owing to financial pressures, **over 1,000 pharmacies have closed permanently since 2016**.
- **This situation is unsustainable, intolerable, and requires urgent attention.** Government should seek to work with the sector to **review the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF)** – under which pharmacies operate and are paid – ensuring it delivers the funding pharmacies need to serve their patients.
- Pharmacy funding requires an urgent uplift if it is to continue to support the network of pharmacies, and the future CPCF must include an uplift mechanism to prevent funding from falling short due to rising costs and inflationary pressures.
- The Contract Sum needs to be set at an economically sustainable level. We estimate this would be **c. £3.8bn** in 2024/25, an increase of **£1.2bn**.
- Without correction, Government and the NHS can expect to see pharmacy closures continuing and likely eventual destabilisation of the market as remaining pharmacies are unable to cope with the workload increases.

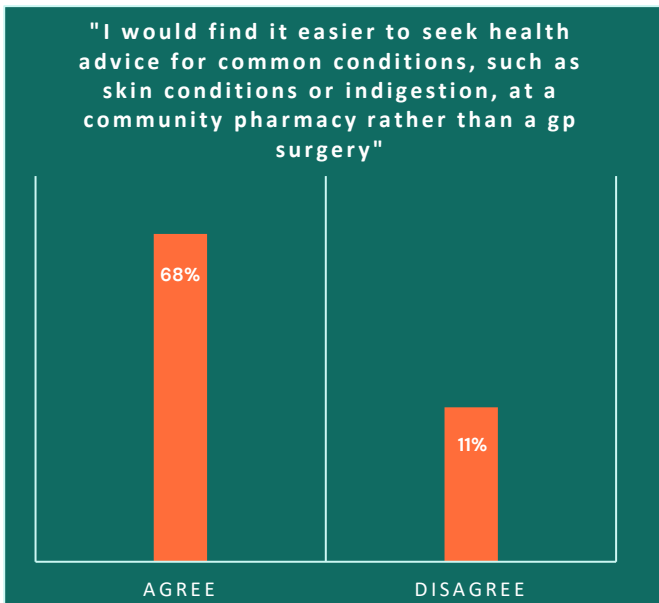
### 2. A full review of the medicines supply market, and short-term relief measures

- An immediate issue that the Government must solve is the instability of the medicines supply market.
- Recent reports of medicines shortages for the treatment of [ADHD](#), [HRT](#), [diabetes](#) and [epilepsy](#) (to name a few) are **greatly concerning and require action**.
- Pharmacists are working very hard to minimise disruption to patients, but they are often unable to supply these medicines immediately, and because of pricing issues pharmacy businesses are sometimes being asked to make a financial loss as they supply medicines, which is not sustainable.
- To get to grips with this issue, Community Pharmacy England has called for a **full review of the medicines supply chain**. We would also like to take forward some measures, such as allowing pharmacists to make minor adjustments to prescriptions, to help alleviate some of the issues.
- Alongside this, a **review of the pharmacy medicines purchase margin system is needed**. Currently around 30% of pharmacies' NHS funding is delivered through margin they are allowed

to make on medicines purchases: this incentivises effective purchasing saving millions of pounds for the NHS every year, but the supply chain is now struggling to operate effectively given the UK's low-price environment. A full review is required which may result in developments such as benefit sharing and relief mechanisms.

### 3. Investment in community pharmacy's clinical future

- At the heart of the NHS Long Term Plan is a desire to build a health service that gives people more choice, more control, and above all, puts patients first.
- The NHS is also continuing to grapple with issues such as waiting lists and problems with access to General Practice.
- The community pharmacy sector already has an integral role in providing accessible health advice to patients and the new Pharmacy First service will build on this.
- For many patients, **seeing a pharmacist is often the quickest and simplest way** to receive health advice, which is recognised by the Pharmacy First service<sup>1</sup>. Patients also report **overwhelming positive experiences** of pharmacies in terms of receiving good advice and being treated with respect.
- A **Vision for community pharmacy**, published by the King's Fund and Nuffield Trust in 2023, outlined several new services which could further help to improve access to General Practice and support the nation's health and wellbeing.
- From targeted measures to support **women's health and delivering more NHS vaccinations, to supporting weight management and smoking cessation**, the sector has huge potential to alleviate pressure elsewhere in primary care, while keeping more people healthy.
- With the population living longer, and often with more complex health needs, pharmacists can play a key role in identifying and supporting the management of long-term conditions. The Vision for community pharmacy identifies **asthma and diabetes** as examples where the monitoring of medicines and annual reviews could take place in community pharmacies.
- The **NHS hypertension case-finding service** provides an example of a diagnostic service, and this could be built on to develop a service in which pharmacies not only identify, but also treat and help patients to manage their condition. This would further **relieve pressure elsewhere in**



<sup>1</sup> YouGov polling commissioned by Community Pharmacy England, March 2023 (n= 1774)

**the healthcare system**, including reducing hospital admissions where pharmacies are able to help people to better manage their existing healthcare conditions, preventing exacerbations.

- Pharmacists' clinical skills should be made best use of to encourage patients to seek advice sooner and more conveniently, and this must include making full use of the growing network of pharmacists with Independent Prescribing qualifications.
- The Vision outlined several further pharmacy initiatives which could help to prevent ill health, reducing burden across primary and secondary care. Further developments could include **undertaking targeted health checks and screening for at-risk groups**, better connections with wider support services such as social prescribing, and pharmacies playing an increased role in early detection of ill health through **advances in technology such as wearable diagnostics**.

#### 4. A plan to safeguard the pharmacy workforce

- To make full use of the clinical competence of pharmacists, we must address workforce shortages in the sector to ensure there is sufficient staff to deliver care for patients.
- Since the introduction of the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme (ARRS) into the NHS general practice contract in 2019, **thousands of pharmacists have been** recruited into GP surgeries and PCNs, the majority of them from community pharmacy.
- While there are fewer pharmacists in the community, **the cost of locum pharmacists has gone up by 80%** between 2022 and 2023 and forecast to be 100% this year.
- **Pharmacies can only deliver further services in the community if they have the necessary staff.** Government should work with the NHS on a **pharmacy-specific workforce recruitment, retention and return plan**.