

Guidance for hosting a pharmacy visit with your local MP

This briefing provides guidance to help LPCs and contractors organise successful visits to community pharmacies for local MPs.

Why you should ask your MPs to visit a pharmacy?

Like all sectors, community pharmacy needs the support of as many MPs as possible to help us to influence Government thinking and policy on an ongoing basis. At the moment, we particularly need the support of MPs to help press for an urgent funding intervention to protect pharmacy services. A visit to a local pharmacy in their constituency provides a valuable opportunity for your MP to learn about the current workings of the sector from the 'grassroots', including any local issues you are experiencing. It is a chance to remind them of the value of pharmacy and how much patients and local communities rely on pharmacy, and to show their support for the sector. We also need to show them the severity of the pressures facing pharmacies at the moment.

Why would an MP visit a pharmacy?

MPs are keen to show support for local businesses and services. They like to show their commitment to their local area and can be passionate about defending local services that may be facing closures. Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs will be particularly amenable to visiting pharmacies which provide much-valued services to the community but are seriously struggling under financial pressure. Conservative MPs may be less critical of Government policies, but should still be concerned about local businesses and it is important that we get across to them the risks if no Government action is taken soon. Often, MPs will use visits as anecdotes for speeches in Parliament to signal their passion for their constituency and argue for Ministers to intervene.



Pharmacy Funding overview

A five-year funding settlement, the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework (CPCF), was set between CPE, the Department of Health and Social Care, and NHS England in 2019. It was agreed that the funding for this would remain fixed at £2.592 billion per year, but annual reviews would test the progress of the deal, and pharmacies would be helped to ease capacity constraints. Negotiations on the next contract will begin in 2024.

Since 2019, pharmacies have been grappling with increasing pressures, and little progress has been made on releasing capacity within the sector. Costs and workload have continued to rise rapidly, with inflationary pressures that could never have been predicted when the funding deal was agreed, and pharmacies have also taken on a range of new services that support their patients.

What has pharmacy been calling for?

Please visit the 'Political engagement' section on our website, for a summary of our current key messages and briefings, which are updated regularly: <https://cpe.org.uk/our-work/representation/communications-and-public-affairs/engaging-with-mps/>

Organising a visit: A step by step guide

Identify your MPs

It is important to first identify the right MPs to engage with, and find out which party they belong to, and whether any of them serve as a Minister or front bench spokesperson. If you are engaging with MPs who you do not know, it is a good idea to do some background research. Look for links to community pharmacy or healthcare, as this will give you an idea of their position, through resources such as Hansard or their websites. Feel free to also contact us to find out if we have had any recent contact.

If you already have a relationship with an MP, then you will know this and should be able to pick up some of your previous conversations with them – e.g. they may have been interested in a particular local service or might be keen to see pharmacies doing more to support a particular health agenda.

If you need any help or guidance on this, please email commsteam@psnc.or.uk. You will most likely deal with MPs' constituency assistant, make a note of their contact details as they could



be very useful in the future. The following website has a search function which will allow you to easily find your MP: <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps>

Choose the pharmacy for the visit

Make sure you invite MPs to visit a pharmacy within their constituency. Contractors can use Parliament's postcode checker to confirm your local MP – this will be helpful if your pharmacy is in a different constituency boundary to where you live.

The pharmacy you choose needs to demonstrate community pharmacy's best assets. Whether this is because of its accessibility or because of the quality and range of services provided, choose a local pharmacy that shows the best of community pharmacy. However, it may also be important for MPs to see how pressurised pharmacies are during the normal course of the day.

Make the right approach

Visits should be billed as an opportunity for MPs to see first-hand the work their local pharmacy teams do, as well as to better understand the challenges they face. Many MPs will be keen to show their constituents that they are supporting local health services, so it would be useful to emphasise the chance to take photos, collaborate on a local press release, and show support for a highly valued team of health professionals in the local community. A template email invitation is included as Appendix 1. Once you have secured a visit, you can follow up with some of our MP briefings which can be found on our website at: <https://cpe.org.uk/learn-more-about-community-pharmacy/information-for-politicians/>

As well as showcasing community pharmacy, a visit will provide an opportunity to discuss pharmacy policy and the challenges facing the sector. Be aware that the visit may be short, due to diary pressures, meaning you will need to be clear about what you want them to understand and how you would like them to support you. Be ready for the question: "How do you want me to help?".

Publicise the visit after it has taken place

In light of the changing security arrangements for MPs, it is now extremely important that the details of any MP visit, including time, date and location, remain strictly confidential in advance of the visit. This is to ensure that MPs can be confident that the visit can go ahead safely.



After the visit has taken place, you can:

- Contact your local newspapers and send them a local press release (we can help with this if needed), including quotes agreed with the MP and other attendees. The release should be eye catching without being sensational. Use it to fly the flag for the work of community pharmacists and give an overview of the purpose of the visit and detail the individuals present.
- Make sure you include a quote from the pharmacy owner, the MP and any other relevant attendees (e.g. commissioner representative). You can approach all of these people in advance of the visit about adding a quote to the release, or you can ask the MP for a quote on the day itself – just make sure they have final sign off.
- Remember to keep an eye out for any coverage, including on the MP's communications channels!
- Take photos of the visit for you to use on social media, and share them as part of the press release.
- Social media is important to a lot of MPs, so be sure to share photos of the visit on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and any other available channels. Encourage the MP and their office to share photos as well.

Follow up

After the event, thank all those involved in the visit, particularly the MP and their point of contact with you. There may be an opportunity to provide them with a further briefing, or to put them in touch with CPE on specific points that arose during the visit.

Report back to local pharmacy contractors

LPCs should make sure you tell your contractors about the visit and any outcomes; it may inspire them to get involved in lobbying MPs in the future. You can also let us know by emailing us at: comms.team@cpe.org.uk

How can MPs help?

MPs will often ask if they can do anything to help and you can suggest the following:

Submit Parliamentary Questions

MPs may offer to ask parliamentary questions to show their support for pharmacy. MPs can ask oral parliamentary questions in the House of Commons chamber. These will usually be at departmental questions or Prime Minister's Questions. Written parliamentary questions can also be submitted by MPs to Government departments. These always receive an answer from the Minister and are a useful way to elicit information.



Letters and questions to Ministers

If MPs show an interest in the challenges facing the sector, ask if they are prepared to write letters or put questions to Ministers/officials calling for additional support. This could be on general funding issues or perhaps specific issues they take an interest in. You can offer to draft a letter for the MP in the first instance (we can help with this too), however some prefer to draft their own.

Join the pharmacy group in Parliament

MPs can also support the work of the All-Party Pharmacy Group (APPG) in Parliament, so please do encourage them to join. The group is actively sponsored and supported by us jointly with the other pharmacy bodies. The group hosts events and coordinates parliamentary activities to promote pharmacy. If an MP would like to join as a member, or simply find out more about upcoming events, they can email: contact@pharmacyappg.co.uk

If you have any queries or require more information, please contact:

comms.team@cpe.org.uk

Appendix 1: Template letter to invite MPs to a visit

Dear [name of MP],

[I am writing on behalf of [Local Pharmaceutical Committee], which represents all [optional: number of] community pharmacies across [area], including those in [constituency].

[I am a pharmacy owner in your constituency.]

I wanted to reach out personally and invite you to visit [name of pharmacy] to find out more about the work the team do to support patients and the public. Community pharmacists are trusted healthcare professionals: millions of people rely on them every day for access to life-saving medicines, healthcare advice and other clinical services.

I would also urge you to do all you can to ensure that this pharmacy and thousands of others across the country are protected from closure. Over 1000 pharmacies have closed since 2015, any further closures will put unbearable strain on the local healthcare system and make the



current issues worse. This could mean that patients don't have the same easy access to vital medicines as was previously available.

I hope that a visit such as this is of interest, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Kind regards,

[xxx]