

# Briefing on reduced opening, and closures, of community pharmacies

The community pharmacy sector in England has experienced a 30% funding decrease in real terms since 2015. This had led to significant pressures and severe degradation in the range of services that pharmacies can offer. Consequently, many pharmacies are reducing their opening hours and there is an increased number of pharmacy closures – both permanent and temporary, occurring at a level previously unseen. This briefing provides an update on these reductions and closures. We are continuing to call on the NHS and Government to increase core pharmacy funding to assure the long-term sustainability of community pharmacies.

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## Opening hours reductions

Pharmacies are working extremely hard to provide care to patients in difficult circumstances. In our 2023 [Pharmacy Pressures Survey](#), 76% of pharmacies reported that they were experiencing staff shortages and 96% said their operating costs were continuing to rise.

In the face of these immense financial and operational challenges they are having to make tough decisions such as cutting back on their opening hours.

## Level of decline in opening hours

In the 12 months leading up to 30th September 2023, NHS data shows the number of scheduled weekly opening hours across the community pharmacy network **declined by 8.2%** (equating to almost 1 in 12 weekly hours lost across the network).

On 30th September 2022, according to the NHSBSA's quarterly Consolidated Pharmaceutical List, there were 620,861 opening hours per week. This had reduced to 565,798 hours per week by 30th September 2023 (including the removal of closures processed by NHS England on 30/09/23 itself).



## Reasons behind the reduction

There are a number of factors behind this, including closures (3.1% fewer pharmacies); an NHS decision to reduce opening hours obligations for 100-hour pharmacies (allowing these pharmacies, who previously had to be open 100 hours each week, to reduce their opening hours to 72 hours per week); and some standard contract pharmacies (who are usually obliged to be open for 40 core hours per week) reducing the additional supplementary hours that they are open for over and above the 40 hour minimum. The number of pharmacies open for 100 hours a week reduced by over 800 to just under 200 in the 12 months to 30th September 2023.

These actions are all consistent with the extreme economic pressures that pharmacies are facing, given the combination of very high general inflation levels, other rising costs for a variety of reasons, and the real terms decline in funding over recent years. These effects can be expected to continue and deteriorate further unless pharmacies' core funding deficit is addressed by the Government.

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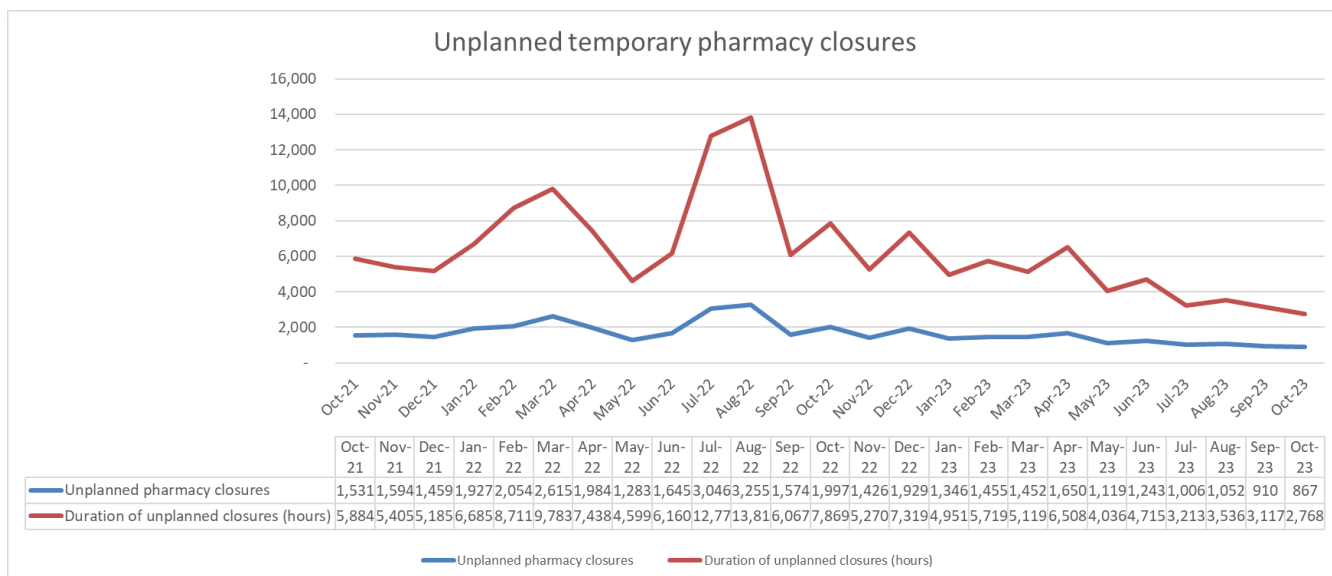
## Temporary closures

Regulations mean that pharmacies can only dispense medicines if there is a pharmacist on site. As such, even if a prescription has been dispensed and packaged, this cannot be handed over to the patient without the oversight of a pharmacist.

If a pharmacist cannot be present due to unforeseen circumstances, then the pharmacy will be forced to temporarily close. As set out in the [Terms of service](#), pharmacies have a legal duty to notify the NHS if they cannot open.

## Number of temporary closures

There were **41,419 recorded temporary closures** between October 2021 to October 2023.



The length of each temporary closure of a pharmacy will vary depending on the specific circumstances. The average length of a temporary closure in this period was approximately 4 hours.

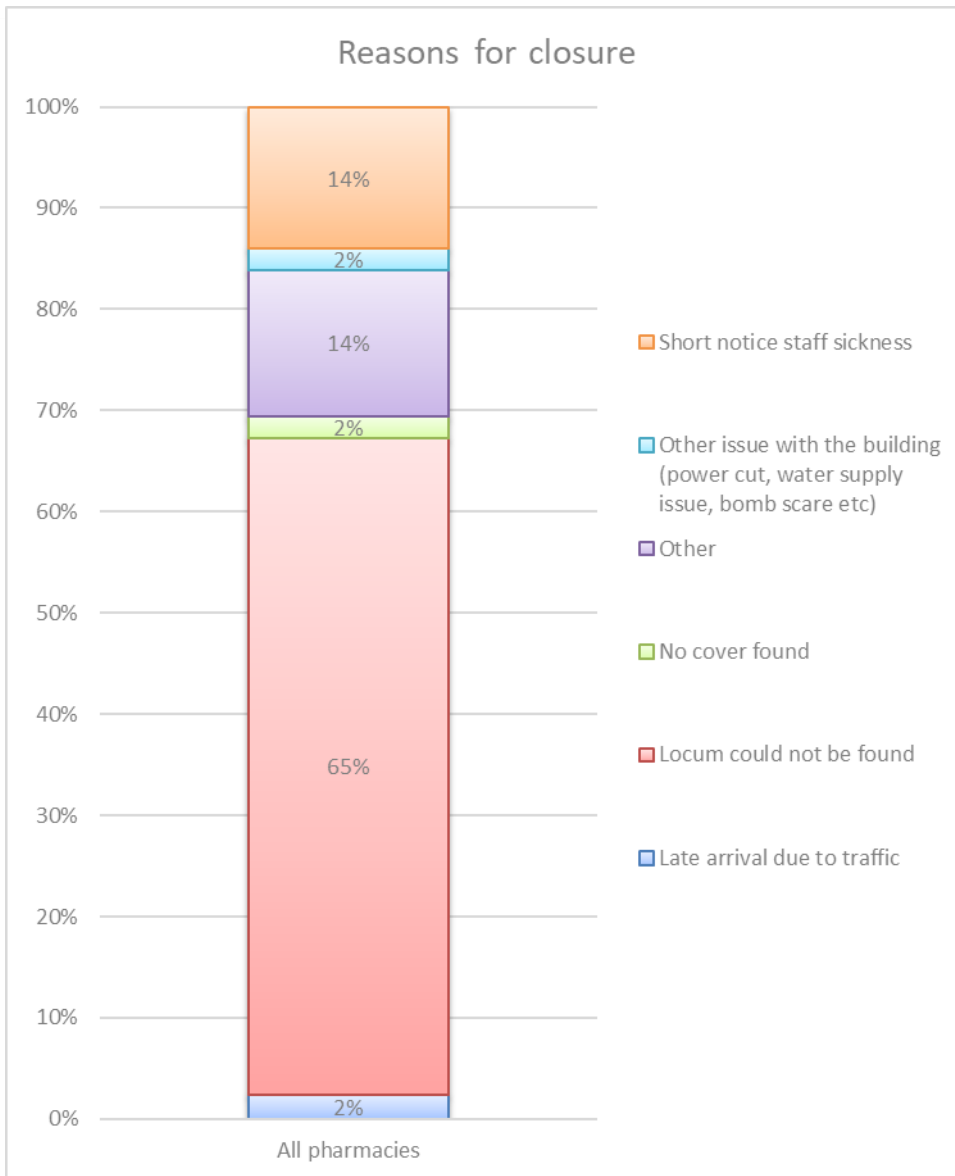
## Reasons for temporary closures

There are several circumstances that can lead a pharmacy to temporarily shut its doors, however, the most common reason is the inability to secure a locum pharmacist to work in the pharmacy – ‘locum could not be found’ was cited as the reason for 65% for all pharmacies closing.

Other common reasons for temporary pharmacy closures include:

- Lack of availability of permanent staff;
- Short notice staff sickness; and
- Other reasons including late arrival of locum and issues with the pharmacy premises (e.g. power cut).

The following graph shows the most common reasons for temporary closures.

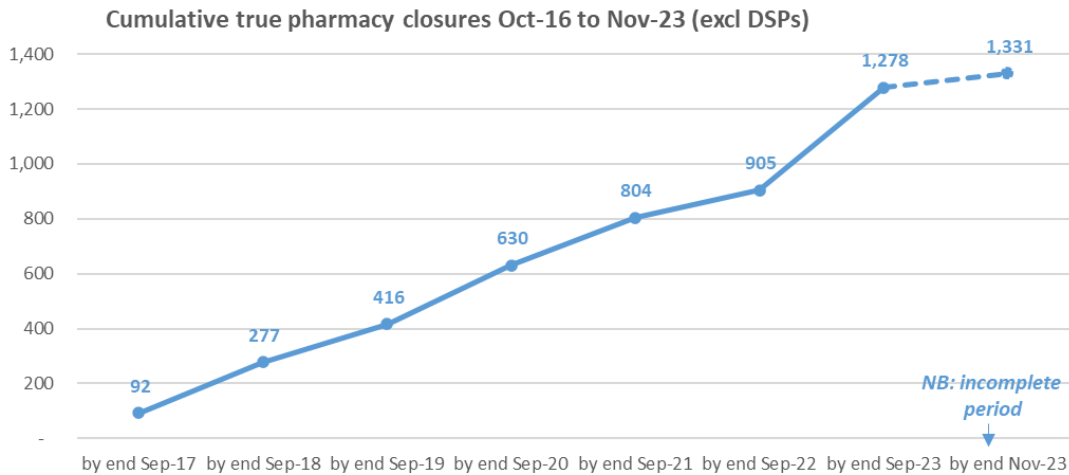


## Change in the number of English NHS Pharmacies

NHSBSA publish monthly data tracking the number of openings and closures. The latest available data is for 30th November 2023, and this shows pharmacy numbers of 10,671 open on that date. This is down from 11,720 on 30th September 2016, **a net reduction of 9.0%**.

In the previous three months leading up to 30th November 2023, and outside of the period of the bulk closures of pharmacies in Sainsbury's earlier in the year, there was a net reduction of 104 pharmacies which averages at over one pharmacy closing a day.

Whilst some pharmacies have opened during this period, it is estimated that between October 2016 and November 2023, there were a total of **1,376 permanent pharmacy closures**<sup>1</sup>. 45 of these closures were for Distance Selling Pharmacies.



True closure counted when a pharmacy ceases operating, and no other pharmacy opens at that address. Excludes DSPs. Pharmacy closures based on analysis of NHS Digital pharmacy list at <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/assets/ods/current/edispensary.zip>

## Most pharmacy closures are in deprived areas

It is extremely worrying that the data shows that almost half of pharmacy closures are taking place within the most deprived areas. 50% of the pharmacy closures recorded were in the lowest three deciles for deprivation.

The map below shows the number of pharmacy closures by local authority.

<sup>1</sup> Permanent closures are identified where a pharmacy is recognised as closing by the NHS without a new one opening at the same place.

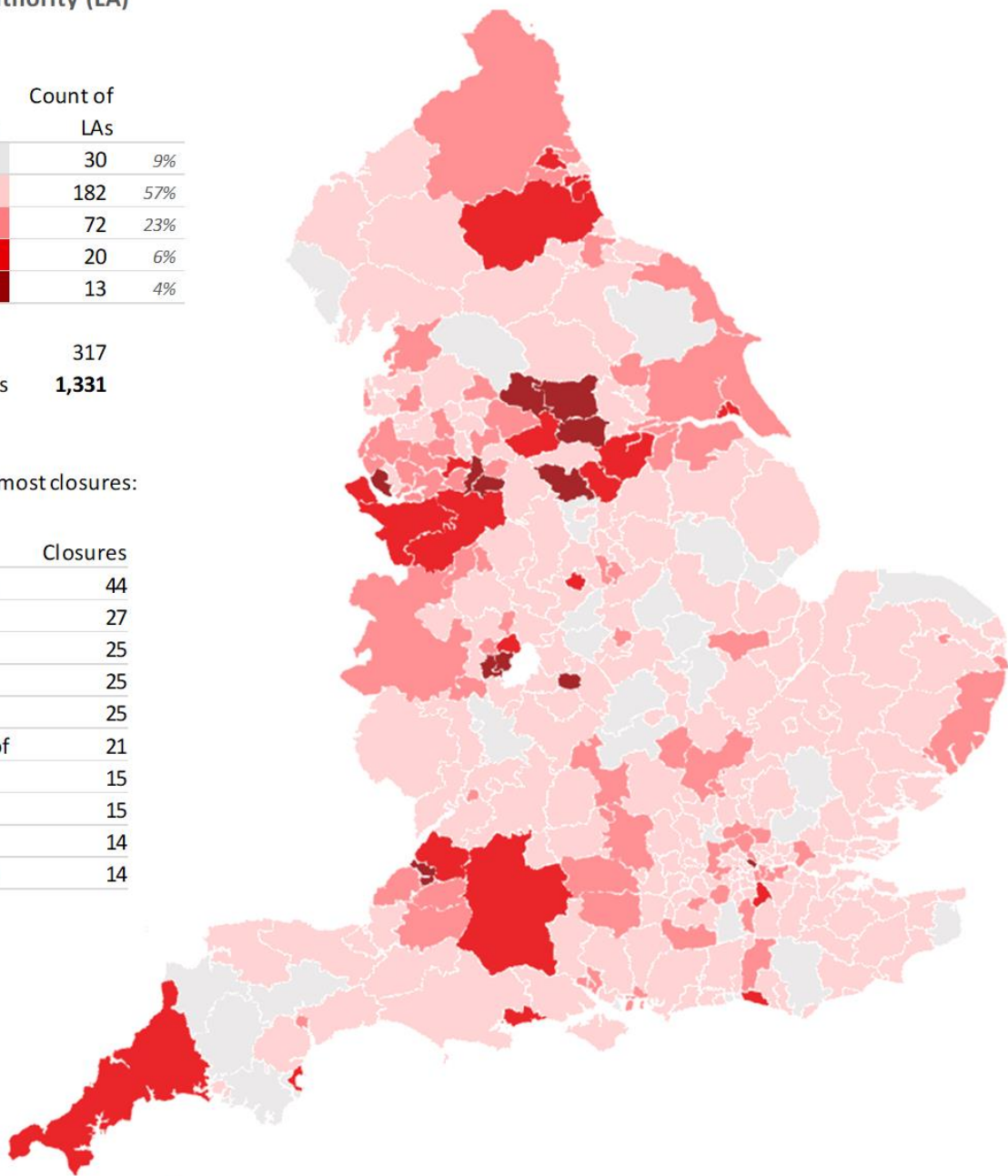
## England pharmacy closures from Oct-16 to Nov-23 by Local Authority (LA)

No. closures:	Count of LAs	
0	30	9%
1 to 4	182	57%
5 to 8	72	23%
9 to 12	20	6%
over 12	13	4%

Total LAs: 317  
Total closures **1,331**

### Ten LAs with most closures:

LA Name	Closures
Birmingham	44
Liverpool	27
Bradford	25
Manchester	25
Leeds	25
Bristol, City of	21
Sheffield	15
Coventry	15
Dudley	14
Westminster	14



2019 Local Authority boundaries. True closure counted when a pharmacy ceases operating, and no other pharmacy opens at that address. Excludes closures of DSPs. Number of pharmacy closures based on analysis of NHS Digital pharmacy list at <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/assets/ods/current/edispensary.zip>

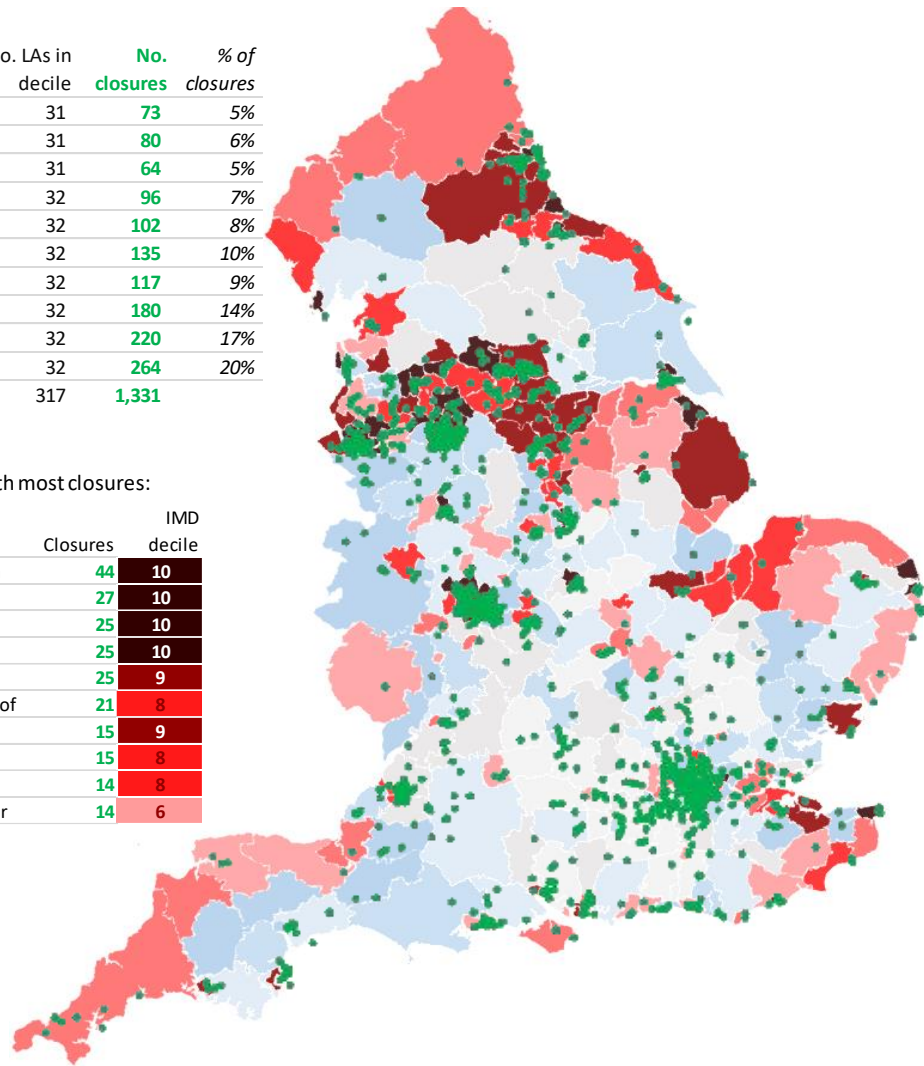
The map below shows the total number of pharmacy closures against a gradient deprivation map of England.

**England pharmacy closures from Oct-16 to Nov-23 vs. deprivation by Local Authority (LA)**

	IMD rank decile	No. LAs in decile	No. closures	% of closures
Least deprived areas	1	31	73	5%
	2	31	80	6%
	3	31	64	5%
	4	32	96	7%
	5	32	102	8%
Most deprived areas	6	32	135	10%
	7	32	117	9%
	8	32	180	14%
	9	32	220	17%
	10	32	264	20%
England total		317	1,331	

Ten LAs with most closures:

LA Name	Closures	IMD decile
Birmingham	44	10
Liverpool	27	10
Bradford	25	10
Manchester	25	10
Leeds	25	9
Bristol, City of	21	8
Sheffield	15	9
Coventry	15	8
Dudley	14	8
Westminster	14	6



2019 Local Authority boundaries. Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) deciles based on 2019 average IMD score for Local Authorities (LAs). True closure counted when a pharmacy ceases operating, and no other pharmacy opens at that address. Excludes closures of DSPs. Number of pharmacy closures based on analysis of NHS Digital pharmacy list at <https://files.digital.nhs.uk/assets/ods/current/edispensary.zip>

## References

Data provided by NHS England and the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA), analysed by Community Pharmacy England.

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