

Pressures Survey 2024: Medicines Supply: summary of report

Background

Community Pharmacy England conducts an annual Pressures Survey of pharmacy owners and pharmacy team members. This is the third annual survey, and it shows that the pressures pharmacies face are now worse than ever before. The owners of over 6,100 pharmacy premises, as well as more than 2,000 pharmacy team members responded to the survey.

Patients hit by worsening medicines supply problems on a daily basis

Medicines supply problems have become a daily occurrence in pharmacies across England, putting patients' health at great risk.

- **Nearly all (97%) of pharmacy team members report patients being inconvenienced as a result of medicine supply issues.**
- **79% of pharmacy team members report that patient health is being put at risk due to medicine supply issues.**
- **And 99% of pharmacy team members are encountering issues at least weekly, and 72% now face multiple issues a day.**
- **Medicines supply issues have been ranked by pharmacy owners as one of the most severe pressures on their businesses.**

Long-term viability of pharmacies at risk

As well as the immediate risks to patient health and wellbeing, the medicines supply issues are affecting pharmacy businesses, adding to the already intolerable operational and financial pressures that they are facing. Without intervention these pressures will lead to the closure of more pharmacies, putting the supply of medicines at increased risk.

This has been caused by a number of factors including pharmacy funding cuts, workforce issues and growing staff costs, rising energy bills, inflationary pressures, and widespread instances of dispensing medicines at a loss due to the chronic medicine supply problems.

Key Findings:

- 1 Medicine supply issues are now routinely affecting patients**
 - 97% of pharmacy team staff report patients being inconvenienced as a result of medicine supply issues, consistent with last year.
 - 97% of pharmacy team members also report **patient frustration** due to medicine supply issues, with 84% saying they had experienced aggression from patients.

- 2 Medicines supply issues are at the worst ever seen**
 - 91% of pharmacy owners report that their business is experiencing a **significant increase in the medicines supply chain/wholesaler issues** compared to last year.

- 3 Medicine supply issues are taking their toll on pharmacy teams**
 - 94% of pharmacy owners report that their teams now spend more time sourcing medicines compared to last year, and 84% say their teams are **spending longer than ever before sourcing medicines**.
 - 97% of staff members report extra workload, and 96% report **additional stress for staff as consequences of medicine supply issues**, consistent with last year.

- 4 Medicine supply issues also increase burden on general practice**
 - Pharmacists are working very hard to minimise disruption to patients, but they are often unable to supply medicines with supply issues immediately, and issues can add to the burden on GPs as well as pharmacies.
 - Asked how often GP practices had to be contacted about supply chain issues, **60% of pharmacy team members said this was a daily occurrence**.

- 5 Medicine supply issues are adding to the intolerable financial pressures on community pharmacy businesses**
 - Pharmacies often find themselves incurring financial losses due to inflated medicine purchase costs or insufficient reimbursement, further intensifying existing the financial challenges that pharmacies are facing and effectively forcing them to subsidise the NHS medicines bill.
 - Medicines purchasing costs are one of the two biggest drivers for cost increases for pharmacies.
 - Pharmacy business owners list their top 3 highest worries as finances (73%), medicine.

What needs to happen to alleviate these pressures?

- **A full review of the medicines supply market:** we must protect access to medicines and address issues such as under-funding and price concessions.
- **Introduce short-term measures to alleviate supply issues:** we should also take forward immediate measures allowing pharmacists to make minor adjustments to prescriptions to help alleviate some of the issues for patients and reduce burdens on primary care.
- **A review of medicines margin:** 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. But in the UK's low-price environment, the supply chain is now struggling to operate effectively. A full review is needed which may lead to developments such as benefit sharing and relief mechanisms.
- It is also imperative to **review pharmacy funding arrangements** to prevent further closures and ensure continued access to prescription medicines and advice for patients.

Further Information:

<https://cpe.org.uk/our-news/medicines-supply-issues-are-a-daily-battle-pressures-survey-confirms/>

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