



# Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2024

Medicines Supply Report

# 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. In this report from Community Pharmacy England's 2024 Pharmacy Pressures Survey, pharmacy owners and pharmacy teams across England have shared just how critical this situation has now become.

This report is based on the views of the owners (or head office representatives) of over 6,100 pharmacy premises in England and 2,000 pharmacy team members, and it reveals some alarming trends:

- **79% of pharmacy team members surveyed report that patient health is being put at risk due to medicine supply issues.**
- **Nearly all community pharmacy staff report that medicine supply issues are worse than this time last year, with 99% encountering them at least weekly, and 72% now facing multiple issues a day.**

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.

- **Medicines supply issues have been ranked by pharmacy owners as one of the most severe pressures on their businesses.**

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*Our findings make distressing reading, and they should be ringing alarm bells for anybody interested in protecting the health and wellbeing of local communities and the public. We've been warning for some time that these issues must be resolved, and this evidence provides yet another stark warning which must not be ignored.*

**Janet Morrison,**  
**Community Pharmacy England Chief Executive**

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*Part of the problem is the uncertainty – when a patient comes in and we don't have the medicine they need, we have to explain that we simply don't know when we might have it for them. With hundreds of medicines affected, all the time, the stress is never-ending.*

**Anil Sharma,**  
**Community Pharmacy Owner in the East of England**

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# Key Findings on Medicines Supply

The results of both Pharmacy Pressures Surveys clearly show the increasing challenges that pharmacies are having sourcing medicines, and the knock-on impact on patients across England.



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## Medicine supply issues are now routinely affecting patients

- 97% of pharmacy team members report **patients being inconvenienced** as a result of medicine supply issues, consistent with last year's survey results.
- 79% of pharmacy team members report that **patient health is at risk due to medicine supply issues**.

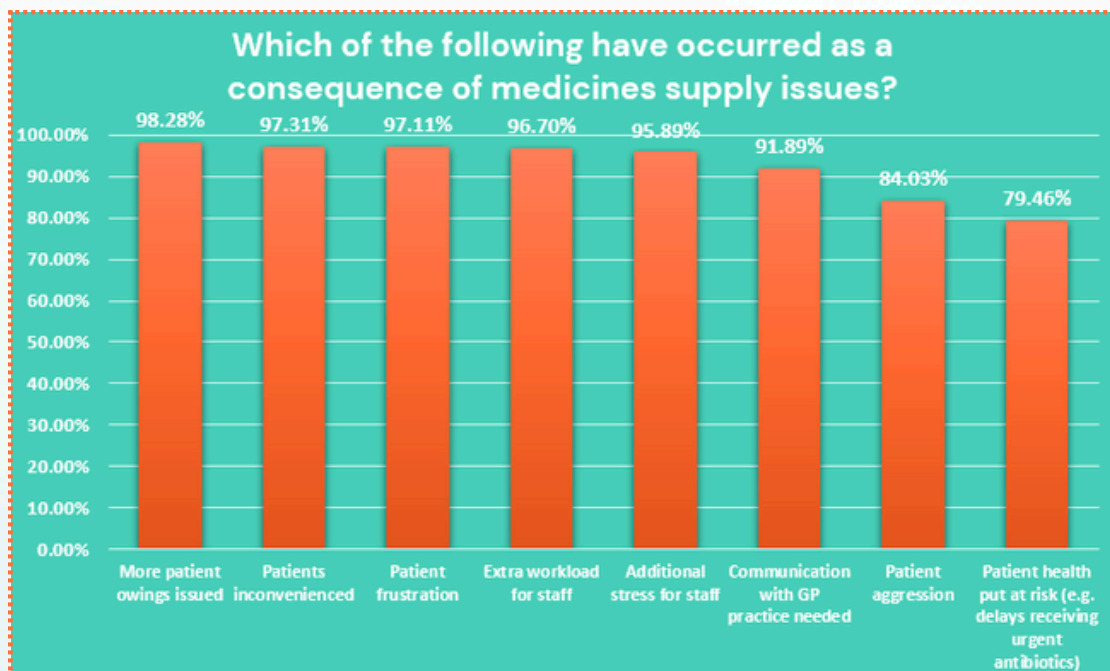
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*Patient prescribed a different brand of medication for epilepsy due to the usually prescribed branded medication being out of stock resulted in patient having an issue as the new brand was ineffective in controlling their epilepsy.*

*Pharmacist*

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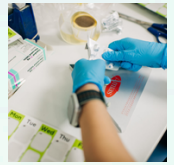
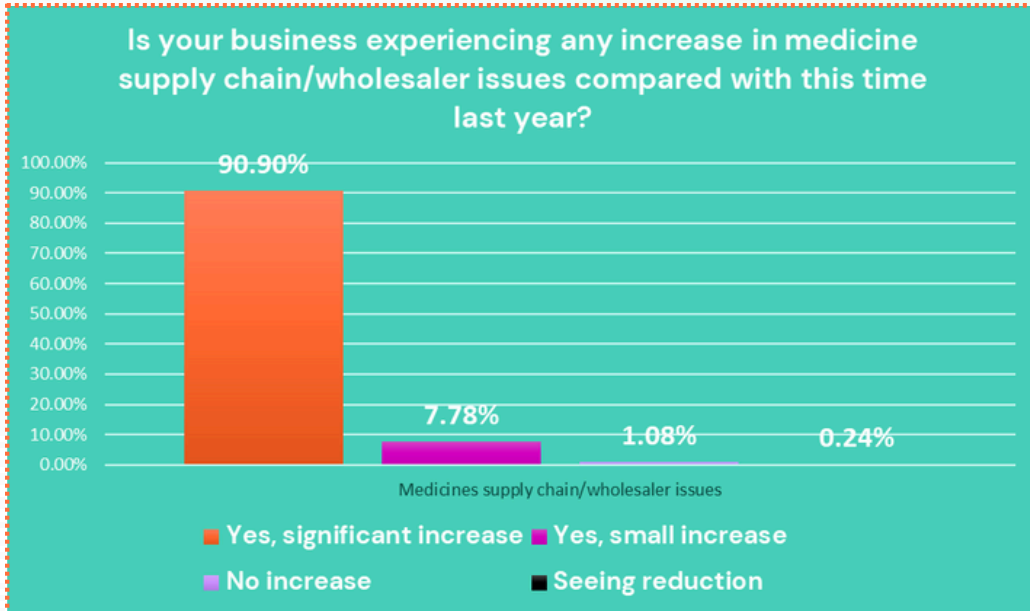
- 97% of pharmacy team members also report **patient frustration** due to medicine supply issues.
- And 98% say **more 'owings' have had to be issued to patients** – this is where only part of their prescription can be dispensed and the patient has to return to the pharmacy another time to collect the rest of their medicine(s).



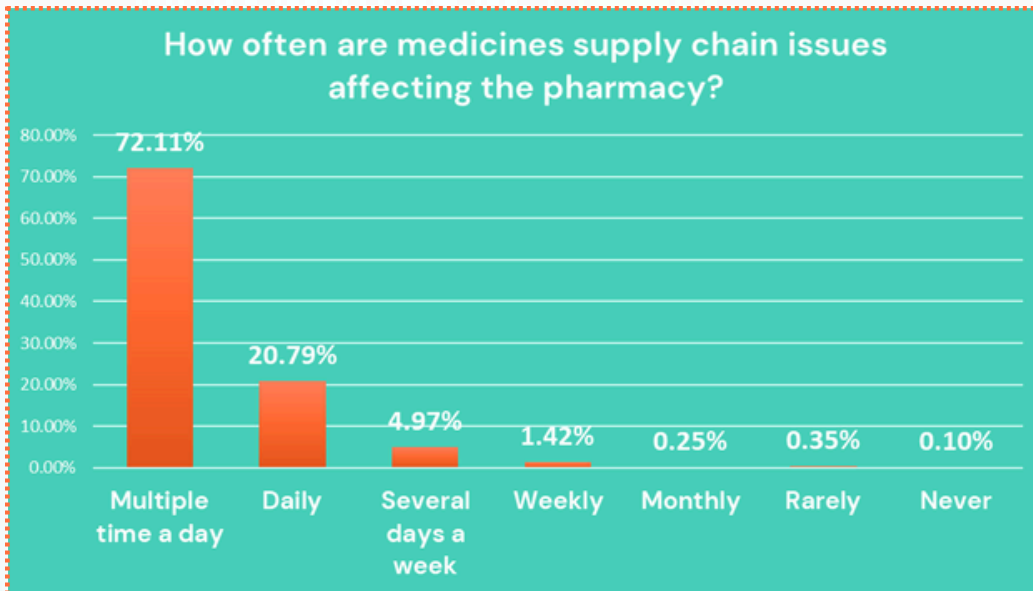
# 2

## Medicines supply issues are at the worst levels pharmacies and patients have ever seen

- 91% of business owners report that their business is experiencing a **significant increase in medicines supply chain/wholesaler issues** compared to last year.



- 99% of pharmacy team members are encountering issues at least weekly, and **72% now face multiple issues a day**.



- 57% of business owners report that their business is seeing a **significant increase in the number of patients who have already visited another pharmacy, since last year**. A further 32% report a small increase.

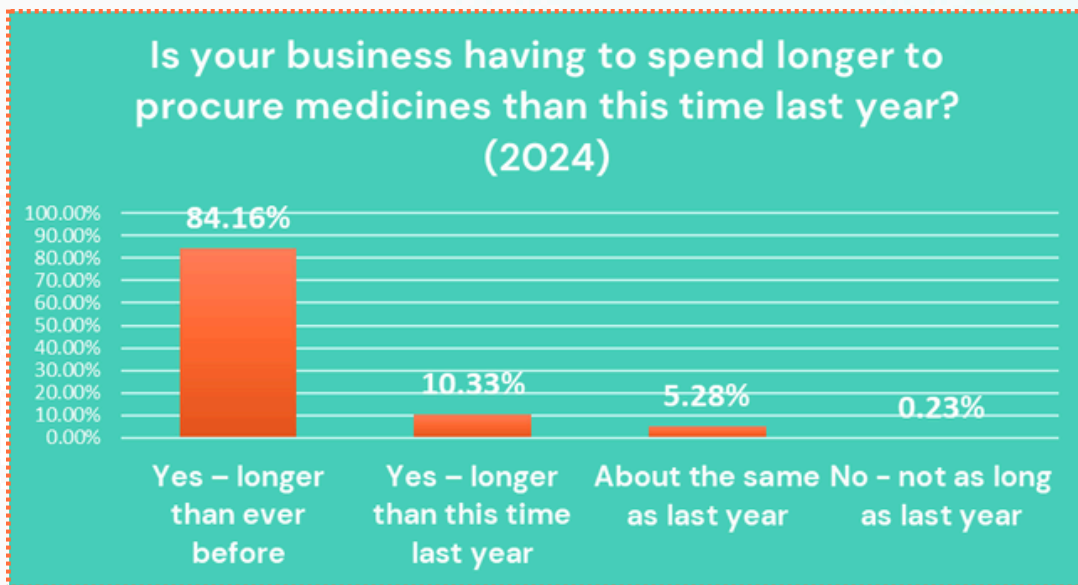


# 3

## Medicine supply issues are taking their toll on pharmacy teams

Medicines supply issues not only disrupt the timely dispensing of medications but also impose significant strain on community pharmacies operationally and financially. Pharmacy teams are investing more of their time and resources in sourcing essential medications, diverting attention from core tasks and adding significantly to workload pressures.

- 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 a consequences of medicine supply issues**, consistent with last year.
- 84% of pharmacy team members said medicine supply issues had led to **patient aggression** in their pharmacy.

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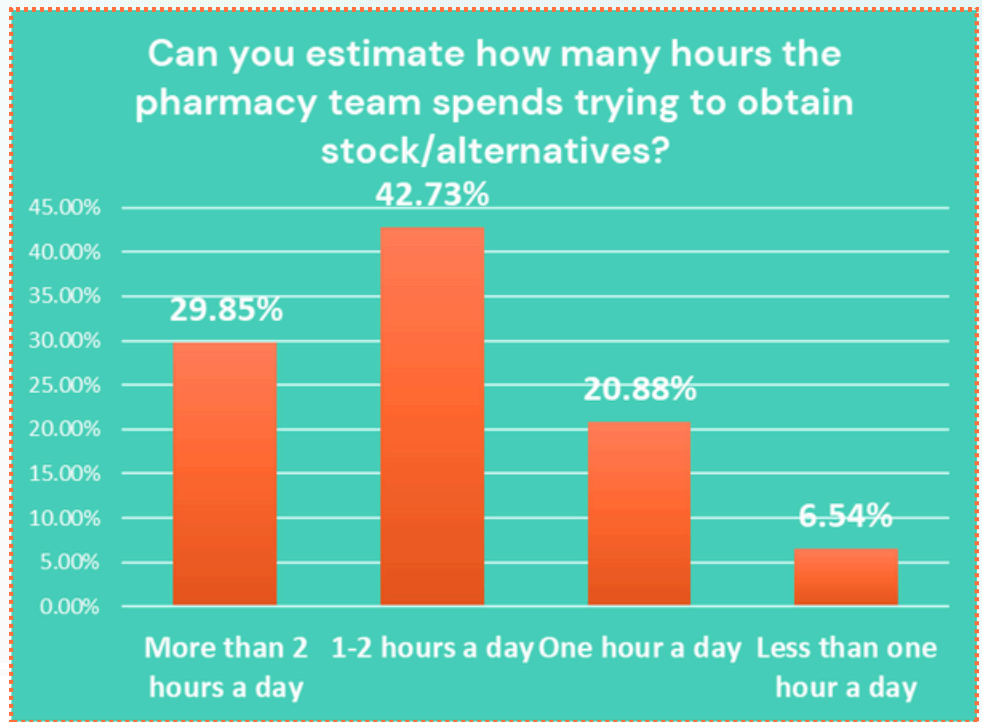
*We have had patients being annoyed and angry, and occasions of people spitting at us. Even if this only happens once it leaves the team on edge all day: it's like walking on eggshells. And because we have a constant queue of people in the pharmacy, there is never chance to take a moment out for yourself – you can feel very overwhelmed. I regularly have staff members in tears by the end of the day because of the sheer pressure of it all.*

**Fin McCaul, independent community pharmacy owner**

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- Almost three-quarters of pharmacy staff estimate spending 1-2 hours a day or more trying to obtain medicine stock or alternatives.

43% report spending 1-2 hours a day, with 30% reporting spending more than 2 hours a day.

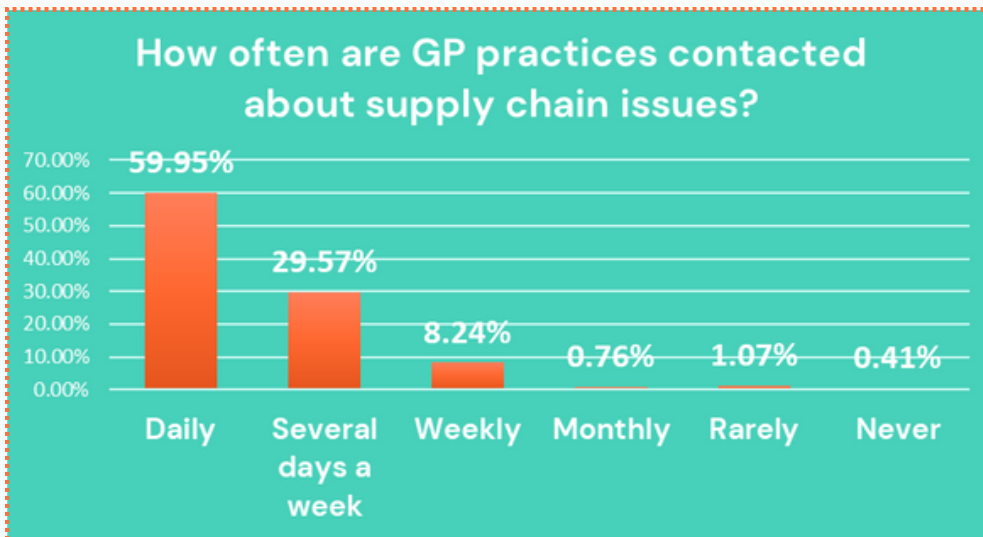


## 4

### Medicine supply issues also increase burden on general practice

Pharmacists are working incredibly hard to minimise disruption to patients, but they are often unable to supply medicines with supply issues immediately, and the 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.**



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*A lot surgeries don't have direct professional lines so this needs to be addressed... pharmacists or staff don't have time to hold on phones. For simple replacements an email can be sent but sometimes a conversation needs to be had between healthcare professionals.*

**Pharmacist**

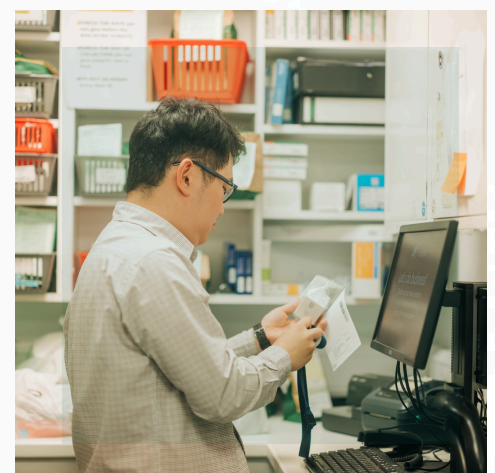
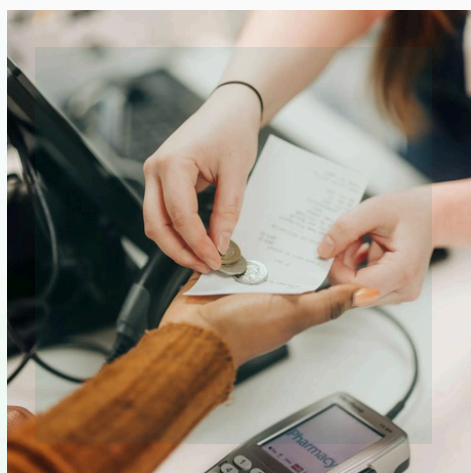
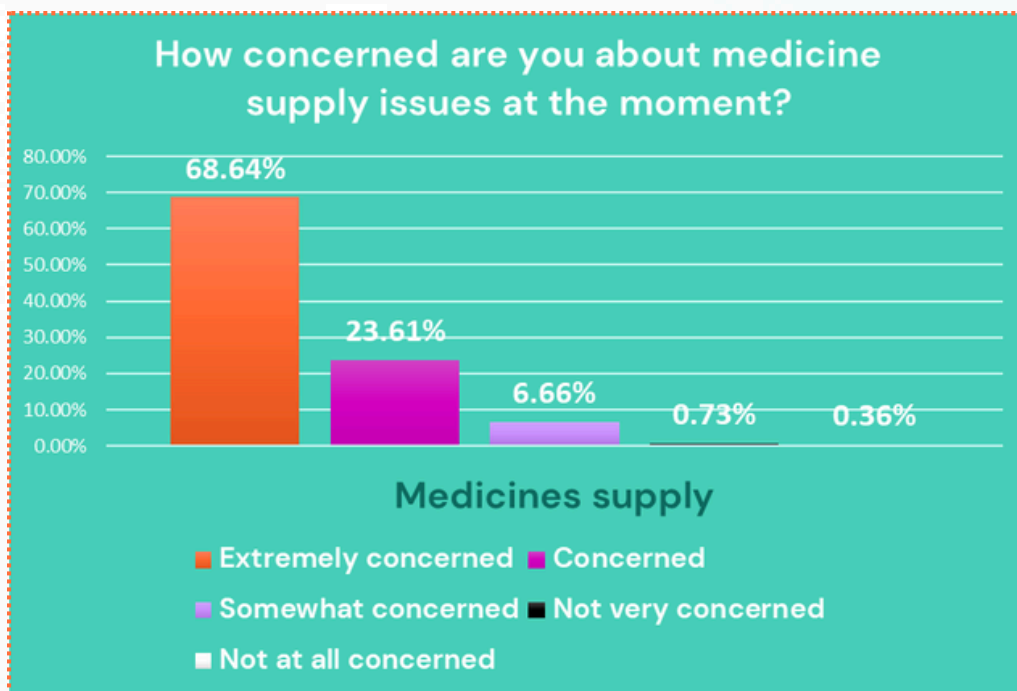
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# 5

## 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 the existing 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% extremely concerned), medicine supply (69% extremely concerned), and team well-being (45% extremely concerned).



# The Patient View

Pharmacy owners and staff members provided examples of how their patients have been impacted by the medicine supply issues. Their stories show how patients' mental and physical health are being put at risk, with some people left struggling with their daily activities.



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*A patient unable to obtain Ozempic has had to transfer to a different treatment, her health has suffered and her absence from work due to ill health has noticeably increased.*

**Pharmacist**

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*We spent hours trying to source the medication from the different suppliers, contacting doctors to prescribe alternatives and patients having to change their medication to different formulations or having to take lower strengths thus affecting their mental health and treatment. Some patients went without medication for few days or even weeks causing them difficulties doing their day-to-day activities.*

**Pharmacist**

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*Medicines supply is always on my mind: when I arrive at the pharmacy the first thing I do is to check the list of outstanding prescriptions to see how many patients are waiting for which medicines. We are constantly checking if we can find these medicines for them, or chasing around trying to sort out an alternative: we now use 8 suppliers to give ourselves the best chance of getting hold of everything.*

**Pharmacist**

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*Sometimes the GPs will ask us to recommend an alternative medication based on what we do have in stock – if this is possible and simple, such as switching from tablets to liquid, then we will do so, but we don't have access to the full patient record and sometimes we are not able to make a suggestion. That puts a lot of pressure on my team.*

**Pharmacist**





The results of the Pressures Surveys and these stories echo the findings of the recent report *Pharmacy: what people want* from Healthwatch England.

The Healthwatch research found that 42% of people have experienced problems getting medicine from their pharmacy in the past 12 months, with almost a quarter of people (24%) having experienced their pharmacy being out of stock of the medicine(s) they needed in the past twelve months. They say this could be an understatement, as some people may not have realised why they were not able to access the medicine they needed.

Of the people who told Healthwatch they have had problems getting medicine from the pharmacy in the past twelve months, 55% said they could not get their medicine on the same day.



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*Medicines supply is an ongoing issue that continues to wreak havoc on patients. Our polling at the end of last year showed that one in four members of the public had experienced shortages in the preceding 12 months, while this report from Community Pharmacy England reveals the extent of concern about shortages among pharmacy teams. Healthwatch England hears about how shortages can lead to rationing and desperate instances of ‘pharmacy bingo’, where patients must travel from pharmacy to pharmacy looking for stock.*

**Will Pett, Head of Policy, Public Affairs & Research  
at Healthwatch England**

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# Context and Trends

Medicines across a range of clinical and therapeutic areas are being affected by supply disruptions at different times, with issues this year affecting in particular medicines used for the treatment of diabetes, ADHD, and epilepsy. Last year, there were availability issues with HRT, adrenalin and antibiotics.

In 2023 there was an average of 149 medicines requiring emergency concession status each month. Products are granted concession prices where there is a pricing issue – this may not always be linked to a supply issue, but they can sometimes be connected, and both are a problem for community pharmacies and patients. This is now a record high number of medicines being affected by pricing issues. For comparison, in 2020/21 there was an average of 49 concessions per month and in 2012/13, the average was only 8 per month.

As a further indicator of the scale of the problem, over the last 12 months, on average Community Pharmacy England received approximately 90,000 pharmacy reports per month of purchases over listed Drug Tariff prices.

These findings are echoed by recent reports including by Healthwatch and also by the Nuffield Trust who said in their report [The future of health after Brexit](#) that: “Multiple indicators show that the past two years have seen constantly elevated medicines shortages, in a new normal of frequent disruption to crucial products, which if anything worsened in 2023. This has placed a significant burden on pharmacists, and has affected the medicines available to patients.”

The causes of the ongoing supply issues are complex, including discontinuation of products and ongoing global supply chain issues. We also believe that low prices of medicines has made the UK a less attractive market for manufacturers and this is contributing to the reduction in supply chain resilience.



*As these survey findings highlight, the medicine supply challenges being faced by community pharmacies and their patients are beyond critical.*

*Patients with a wide range of clinical and therapeutic needs are being affected on a daily basis and this is going far beyond inconvenience, leading to frustration, anxiety and affecting their health. For some patients, not having access to the medicines they need could lead to very serious consequences, even leaving them needing to visit A&E.*

*For pharmacies, ensuring everyone can access the medicines they need has become an ongoing battle, putting immense pressures on pharmacy teams and businesses. They are doing everything that they can to find solutions for all their patients, but powerless as they are to resolve national and even global supply issues, they are being forced to operate with one hand tied behind their back.*

**Janet Morrison, Community Pharmacy England Chief Executive**



# Recommendations

Community Pharmacy England is calling for:

- **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.

Community Pharmacy England wants more to be done to protect community pharmacies and their patients from these ongoing issues. Patients should always have access to the medicines they need, when they need them.



## Background Information on the Pharmacy Pressures Survey 2024

Community Pharmacy England represents all 10,500 community pharmacies in England. This report has been produced based on the results of Community Pharmacy England's 2024 Pharmacy Pressures Survey, which was carried out between early March 2024 and early April 2024. The survey consisted of two parts, an online questionnaire specifically for pharmacy owners (or head office representatives) and another separate questionnaire for pharmacy team members.

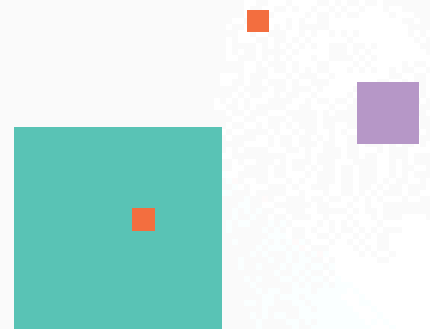
Over 900 pharmacy owners – between them representing more than 6,100 pharmacy premises in England – and over 2,000 pharmacy team members (mostly pharmacists, but also some technicians, dispensers and assistants) took part in their respective surveys. The results once again show a community pharmacy sector in deep distress.

## Further Information and Media

For any further information or media queries, including interview or recording requests, please contact: [comms.team@cpe.org.uk](mailto:comms.team@cpe.org.uk)

Further information on medicine supply issues, including on price concession trends and our recommendations for the future, can be found in our latest [Medicines Supply Briefing](#).

For general background information on community pharmacy see: [Learn more about community pharmacy – Community Pharmacy England](#)





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