

A Call to Action for the next Government

Community Pharmacy Resilience: Save our NHS and protect our communities.

Community pharmacies across the country have gone above and beyond in recent years to protect our NHS and communities. In the face of the extraordinary challenges of recent years – the global pandemic, a war in Europe, supply issues, inflation and workforce shortages set against increased workload from both population growth and from the challenges facing A&E and GPs – community pharmacy teams have remained steadfast in their commitment to providing care in their community. With the introduction of the Pharmacy First service this year, pharmacies are now going even further.

- Pharmacies were the **only** part of the healthcare system that remained open for their patients throughout the whole of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 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. More than 80% of the population live within a [20-minute walk](#) of their local pharmacy.
- Pharmacy's role in providing additional services has been expanded with the launch of Pharmacy First, which empowers people to go to their pharmacy rather than wait for a GP appointment to receive advice and appropriate treatment for seven of the most common conditions. NHS predictions suggest that this and other pharmacy services – such as Blood Pressure Checks and access to Contraception – could free up as many as 10 million GP appointments annually.
- The network of 10,000+ pharmacies, including Distance-Selling Pharmacies, provides the infrastructure and expertise to provide care and advice across the nation. In so doing pharmacies play a huge role in supporting the health of the nation, including reducing health inequalities which is rightly identified as key to the [NHS Long Term Plan](#).

- As privately owned businesses providing NHS services, pharmacies are run by skilled businesspeople who combine an entrepreneurial approach with a real desire to improve health outcomes. Community pharmacies rely on their NHS funding for around 90% of their income.
- Pharmacy is keen to do even more to help improve prevention of ill-health and to manage long-term conditions in the community to continue to relieve pressure in other parts of the primary care system, for example helping reduce NHS waiting lists and pressures on General Practice.

The challenge however is that, after years of stepping into the breach to protect the NHS and our communities during such extraordinary times, our pharmacies are now at breaking point.

We need to build back in renewed resilience in this vital part of our health service so that pharmacies can continue their role on the frontline to save the NHS and protect our communities' long-term health.

As the [Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry](#) recently concluded:

The undoubted potential for pharmacy to improve access to health care, crucially including immunisations, and reduce pressure on general practice and other areas of the health system can only be realised with the right support and the right investment of public funding.

To do so we need from Government:

- A sustainable funding model for community pharmacy
- A full review of the medicines supply market and short-term relief measures
- Investment in community pharmacy's clinical future
- A plan to safeguard the pharmacy workforce

Our four-point plan for the next Government

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.

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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.

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Contact comms.team@cpe.org.uk for further information related to any of the points raised.