

A Guide to Engaging with your local MP

This briefing note provides guidance for LPCs and pharmacy owners on engaging with local politicians. This work is critical to build advocates across the new Parliament and to support national ongoing work making the case for the sector.

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Introduction and background

Following the election of a new Government in July 2024, in a parliament of 650 MPs, there are 335 new MPs from across the political spectrum, with varied understanding of the community pharmacy sector.

With the pressures on community pharmacy ongoing and critical, it is vital that the sector quickly develops new relationships with MPs across all political parties to help build on our existing network of supportive politicians. MPs can help us to persuade the Government and NHS to take action to support community pharmacies in both the short and long-term.

Community Pharmacy England contacted the vast majority of MPs in the first few weeks of the new Parliament, and our ongoing programme of Parliamentary events, briefings and other work is continuing. This guide has been created to

support LPCs and pharmacy owners with local political engagement as this local engagement can be extremely influential alongside our national work.

Included in the document are a range of resources to help contact your local MPs, develop relationships with them, explain the critical situation in community pharmacy, and publicise this engagement to focus further public and media attention on the sector. Specific resources include:

- Template invitations for MPs to visit a pharmacy in your local area;
- Advice on how to structure the visit and communicate key messages to the MPs; and
- A template press release to send to local media.

At this point (July 2024) we recommend that LPCs invite their local MP to visit a pharmacy over the summer recess period. For key national target MPs, you will already have been copied into an email to your MP suggesting this, and for other MPs you may like to reach out separately.

A pharmacy visit can provide a great opportunity to both show MPs the value of community pharmacy, but also to set out the very critical challenges that the sector is facing and seek their support with these. Pharmacy owners may like to offer to host such visits – we recommend contacting your LPC about this – and could also write directly to their local MP to set out the challenges they face.

Guidance on writing to MPs is available here. [Engaging with politicians - Community Pharmacy England \(cpe.org.uk\)](#)

Other topic-specific briefings are available on our website here and these will be further updated and added to over the coming weeks. All of our recent MP briefings, can be found on our website here: [Information for politicians - Community Pharmacy England \(cpe.org.uk\)](#)

Finding and contacting MPs

You can find out who your MPs are and their contact details using the postcode search function on the [UK Parliament website](#) or you can get in contact with our [Communications and Public Affairs team](#) if you have a query on how best to contact them.

We issue template letters for LPCs and pharmacy owners to use to contact their MPs to help with various campaigns. If you want to write to your MPs with specific asks – e.g a request to meet or invitation to visit a pharmacy – you can tailor the template below or refer to our Writing to MPs guidance [here](#). If you have existing relationships with MPs you may not need to use any of these templates.

The best way of getting in touch with your MP to invite them to a pharmacy within their constituency is via email.

Template letter to invite MPs to a visit

Dear [name of MP],

Congratulations on your election as MP for [constituency].

I am writing on behalf of [Local Pharmaceutical Committee], which represents all X community pharmacies across [area], including those in [constituency]. OR 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 lifesaving medicines, healthcare advice and other clinical services, such as the newly launched Pharmacy First service.

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. Due to ongoing critical funding and operational pressures, over 1,000 pharmacies have closed since 2015. Any further closures will put unbearable strain on the local healthcare system – including surrounding pharmacies – 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]

Guidance for hosting an MP visit

Congratulations if you have managed to secure a visit from your Member of Parliament.

Logistics

There are some key points to note about logistics:

- **When Parliament is sitting, MPs will only be available in their constituency on certain days of the week.** You'll need to do your best to accommodate this, ideally choosing a time when you will have a good flow of patients coming into the pharmacy in case the MP wants to talk to patients as well.
- **MPs do face security risks.** It is now extremely important that the details of any politicians and candidates visit, including time, date and location, remain confidential in advance of the visit. This is to ensure that politicians can be confident that the visit can go ahead safely. Only tell people who need to be aware and do not put this information on social media platforms or other channels without express permission from the politician or candidates' teams.
- **MPs will often bring their teams with them.** If team members or researchers do come along, introduce yourself to them as well and give them copies of any briefings you want them to take away with them.
- **Try to plan a focus for the visit.** The main objective of the visit is to help the MP understand community pharmacy and go away wanting to help support the sector. You can ask in advance if there is anything in particular they want to get out of the visit – they may have heard from constituents about medicines supply issues, for example, and knowing this in advance can help you to plan a more successful visit.
- **Plan and print take-home briefings in advance.** MPs and their teams often value having printed materials to take away with them and review in their own time. You can provide them with key briefing documents to support this.
- All of our recent MP briefings, can be found on our website here: [Information for politicians - Community Pharmacy England \(cpe.org.uk\)](https://www.cpe.org.uk/information-for-politicians)

Outline of the day

We have set out below some guidance on how to structure a visit once you get to that point.

- 1. Welcome the Member of Parliament.** Introduce yourself and, if you are comfortable, shake their hand.
- 2. Introduce yourself to anyone else who is joining them on the visit and do the same for any of your colleagues in the store at the time.** An MP will often come along with parliamentary assistants and researchers for photo opportunities. They will likely have responsibility for briefing the MP beforehand and will have been in charge of email correspondence to coordinate the visit, so it is important to have a good relationship with them for future engagement.
- 3. Provide an overview of the visit. Tell them what you want to achieve.**

You might want to say something like:

“I am conscious we only have an hour of your time today so I thought we could have a brief walk around the pharmacy and I’ll tell you a bit about the services we provide. I’d love to understand your priorities but I’d also like to talk you through some of the challenges we are facing and how you can help.”

4. Introduce your business.

- You might want to discuss your opening hours, number of pharmacies in the company, and employee numbers.
- You could include details of how long you and/or your family have worked in pharmacy, any ambitions for the future.
- You should talk about your patients – do you serve a particular demographic or community, is this an affluent or deprived area and what does that mean for health challenges?
- Outline some of the challenges and opportunities that you are facing.

5. Take them around the pharmacy and deliver the sector’s key asks

This is the key part of the visit when you will walk them around the pharmacy showing them all that you do. Some things that you may like to include are:

- **Your consultation room:** explaining the benefits of this and some of the clinical services that you offer and how this benefits patients.
- **Your PMR system:** what this does and how it works.
- **Dispensing:** how does the process work, who on the staff has a role in it, how many items do you dispense.

- **Efficiencies:** anything you have done to make your pharmacy more efficient. Highlight any ongoing pressures on your business.
- **Medicines supply:** how deliveries work, and outlining the ongoing issues with medicines supply and pricing and how this is impacting your patients.
- **Pharmacy First:** how this is going and how many GP referrals you are getting.
- **Patient demand:** is this growing? Are you struggling with this? Have you had to change anything to cope with demand?

Top Tips: Key Points when talking to MPs

- **Be sure to make it a dialogue.** Deliver your key messages but also answer their questions and listen to any information or insights they might share.
- **MPs are often short of time and can be late and leave earlier than expected.** Don't worry about this – but do be succinct and clear in your messages.
- **Try to bring what you are saying to life.** You could do this by using examples from your pharmacy where you have made a significant positive difference to patients, for example, or by using a few key statistics, though you may prefer not to try to remember these and refer to the briefings. You can also share with them some of your accounts information to make the point about rising costs and unsustainable pharmacy funding.

You can find Community Pharmacy England's key messages via our 'Messaging to MPs' note on the website, which are summarised below.

It is important to try to maintain a local angle on the issues discussed during conversations with MPs. For example, pharmacy owners should consider how has your pharmacy, in your experience, been affected by a lack of funding and what does this mean for local patients / service users?

It would be useful, if possible, to have some case studies or anecdotes of Pharmacy First patient interactions and outcomes, and also how many pharmacies in the area are participating.

| Community Pharmacy England's Four-Point Plan | |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 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 and permanent closures of pharmacies. |

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| | <p>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.</p> |
| <p>A full review of the medicines supply market, and short-term relief measures</p> | <p>We must protect access to medicines and address issues such as under-funding and price concessions, a mechanism used when pharmacies cannot source drugs at or below the reimbursement price set out in the Drug Tariff.</p> <p>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.</p> |
| <p>Investment in community pharmacy's clinical future</p> | <p>Building on the new Pharmacy First service, community pharmacies have much more to offer to support the nation's health and wellbeing.</p> <p>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.</p> |
| <p>A plan to safeguard the pharmacy workforce:</p> | <p>Like other health and care settings, community pharmacy is in the midst of significant workforce issues.</p> <p>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. Continued backlogs and long waiting lists healthcare continue have meant impacted our nation's wellbeing, and we need to protect our vital community pharmacies.</p> |

6. Ask what they want to achieve as an MP/what are their priorities?

You might want to say something like:

“Thank you again for your time today and for listening to our key asks. I’d be keen to understand your priorities and how we might be able to work together going forward”.

Allow time for the Member of Parliament to provide their thoughts – they will almost certainly have questions.

Top Tips: Answering MP Questions

- **Show them!** If you can better answer a question by showing them something in the pharmacy, or something on your computer screen, feel free to do this. This can be quite powerful e.g. for illustrating medicine out of stocks or pricing issues, or for sharing accounts information.
- **Don’t be afraid to say you don’t know the answer.** If you are being asked about national or policy issues, you can always say that you will check and follow up by email. It is very likely that you will know the answers to almost all the questions that you MP has, though.

For more general tips on answering questions, you may also find out Media Interview Top Tips guide useful. [Communications, PR and media guidance – Community Pharmacy England \(cpe.org.uk\)](https://www.cpe.org.uk/communications-pr-and-media-guidance)

7. Closing the visit

Once the meeting and tour of the pharmacy is concluded, there are a number of ways to end the meeting while leaving the line of communication open.

- a. If you would like, offer to take a photo together.
- b. Ask if they would like any further information on the discussion from today.
- c. Offer to draft social media posts (with supporting photos) or offer to collaborate on a press release with their team.
- d. Thank them for time and say goodbye.

After the visit

After the pharmacy visit, it is worth emailing the MP again to say thank you for the visit. You could also use this as another opportunity to share briefing documents with them, and to collaborate on a press release if they have agreed to that.

You can also ask MPs to help community pharmacy in any number of ways including:

1. Raise the profile of community pharmacy and the challenges facing the sector

This can include media and publicity as well as sharing what they have seen and understood in conversations with colleagues. We need support from as many political voices as possible. Sharing our messages and helping politicians to do the same is vital.

2. Parliamentary support

After the general election, MPs can:- 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. MPs may also be happy to apply for a parliamentary debate specific to pharmacy.

3. Write letters and questions to Ministers and other senior politicians

If MPs show an interest in the challenges facing the sector, ask if they are prepared to write letters or put questions to Ministers calling for additional support. They might also be keen to raise the issue in parliament: they could call for a select committee inquiry or a debate in Parliament, for example. 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.

4. 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 Secretariat for 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

Template press releases

Following a pharmacy visit, politicians may offer to collaborate on a local press release. Those who are briefed virtually may also offer to publish a supportive statement or release for their websites or local media. A template which could be adapted for either of these is available below which LPCs or pharmacy owners can edit accordingly. We will publish further templates for pharmacy visits held during winter vaccination season.

Pharmacy visit press release template – July 2024

Local MP **calls for investment in/backs** community pharmacies

[Constituency] MP, [insert MP] has called on the Government and the NHS to provide significant investment in community pharmacies to support them to help people in their local area.

[insert MP] visited [insert pharmacy] in [area] to find out how expanded community pharmacy services are benefitting members of the public. One example is the Pharmacy First service, which was introduced in January 2024, which has seen X% pharmacies in the area sign up. The service allows patients to visit their local pharmacy for advice – and where appropriate, be prescribed medicines – from their local pharmacy to treat seven common conditions, and all without needing to get a GP appointment. The conditions included in the service are sore throats, sinusitis, earache, infected insect bites, impetigo, shingles and urinary tract infections in women.

Not only is this available from [pharmacy name], but also a large number of pharmacies in the region have signed up to provide the new 'Pharmacy First' service.

As well as sharing the positive impact on the community from services like Pharmacy First, pharmacists highlighted to [insert MP] the severe pressures facing the pharmacy sector, including increasing instances of dispensing medication at a loss and rising instances of abuse towards pharmacy staff.

Following the visit to [pharmacy] , [insert MP] said:

"I have seen first-hand how hard our local pharmacist teams are working to support patients in [constituency]. Every day, these teams are helping thousands of people with advice and treatment.

"I also heard about the pressures they are facing on the front line ... [insert constituency stats]

"I would welcome further discussions with the Government and Community Pharmacy England, which represents the sector, regarding fair and sustainable funding for the sector. I look forward to seeing the continued benefits for my constituents from extra responsibilities for pharmacies.

Notes and further detail for editors

For further information about this press release, please contact [name, email address and phone number if possible].