

The Rt Hon. the Lord Darzi of Denham OM KBE
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

13 August 2024

Dear Lord Darzi

Congratulations on your appointment to lead the independent investigation of NHS performance. Given the scale and scope of the issues currently facing the NHS, I realise that this will be a challenging task. I have every confidence that your investigation will help to stimulate a realistic and honest conversation about how improvements can be made.

I am writing to you regarding the community pharmacy sector and the extreme financial pressures it faces. Pharmacies are the front door to the NHS, but core funding has been reduced over the past decade by 30 percent in real terms and pharmacy numbers – especially in more deprived communities – are declining. Given that an average pharmacy relies on NHS funding for 90% of its income, we are now a sector at breaking point and need urgent attention. If we can keep the lights on with fair and sustainable funding, pharmacy can do so much more to support public health, help people manage their health conditions and reduce pressure on GPs and secondary care.

This is why we have submitted evidence to your investigation on:

1. The trust the public place in community pharmacies;
2. The significant economic and social value that community pharmacies provide;
3. The declining proportion of total NHS funding spent on community pharmacy;
4. The worse health inequalities as a result of pharmacy closures; and
5. The potential for community pharmacies to do more.

Although the current situation in primary care is precarious, I know with collaboration and support, challenges can be overcome. We are encouraged by the Government's manifesto pledge to create a 'Community Pharmacy Prescribing Service', which would include granting more pharmacists independent prescribing rights, building on the Pharmacy First service. Emphasis on the importance of prevention and delivering health services closer to

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Community Pharmacy England is the operating name
of the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee.



people's homes are aims that we share, and we are keen to ensure pharmacies play a leading part in achieving them both.

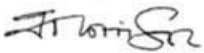
Pharmacy has a huge role to play in reducing waiting times through enhancing access to primary care. However, this potential can only be realised should there be sustainable funding for the sector. I believe there are a number of actions which need to be taken in order to achieve this:

- **Put community pharmacies at the centre of delivery of the Government's primary care priorities.** The Government's aspiration to create a 'Neighbourhood Health Service' should seek to utilise the existing network of 10,000+ community pharmacies, which are found at the heart of neighbourhoods. Our submission to the investigation demonstrates that the public feel they receive good advice from pharmacists and are comfortable seeing them for minor ailments. Pharmacists possess the necessary clinical skills to play a larger role, and the Government should seek to fully utilise their potential.
- **Invest in the long-term stability of the community pharmacy sector.** While pharmacies have never been so busy, demonstrated by increasing prescription volumes and the number of appointments delivered under the Pharmacy First Service, funding has declined sharply. Our submission makes clear that the overall proportion of NHS funding spent on community pharmacy requires an urgent uplift to stabilise the sector, given the 30% real-terms reduction that has taken place since 2015. We also believe that commissioning of GP and community pharmacy services could be better aligned to focus on integration, collaboration and shared goals rather than competing for resources.
- **Halt pharmacy closures.** The reduction in funding is causing pharmacies to close, totalling over 1,400 since the funding cut took effect. Our submission details how half of all closures are taking place in the most deprived areas. Halting further pharmacy closures is vital to tackling health inequalities.
- **Commission further services in community pharmacies.** Our submission details a wide range of further services that can be delivered in community pharmacies. From expanding Pharmacy First to cover more conditions, to more preventative services, an increased role in women's health and long-term condition management, the pharmacy sector has much more it can offer, as long as the Government and NHS can close the funding gap through fair and sustainable funding.



I hope the above points are helpful as you undertake your investigation and I believe these actions are vital to improving primary care services in England. With the limitations on the format of evidence, we were only able to submit a small snapshot of the role of community pharmacy in primary care and within communities, but we would be delighted to share further insight and analysis. Please don't hesitate to contact me at chiefexec@cpe.org.uk if it would be helpful to expand on any of the points made.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet Morrison".

Janet Morrison OBE
Chief Executive